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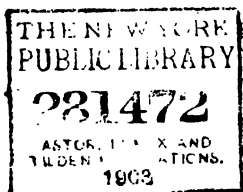
*Rev. James Freeman, D.D.*  
*(Unitarian)*

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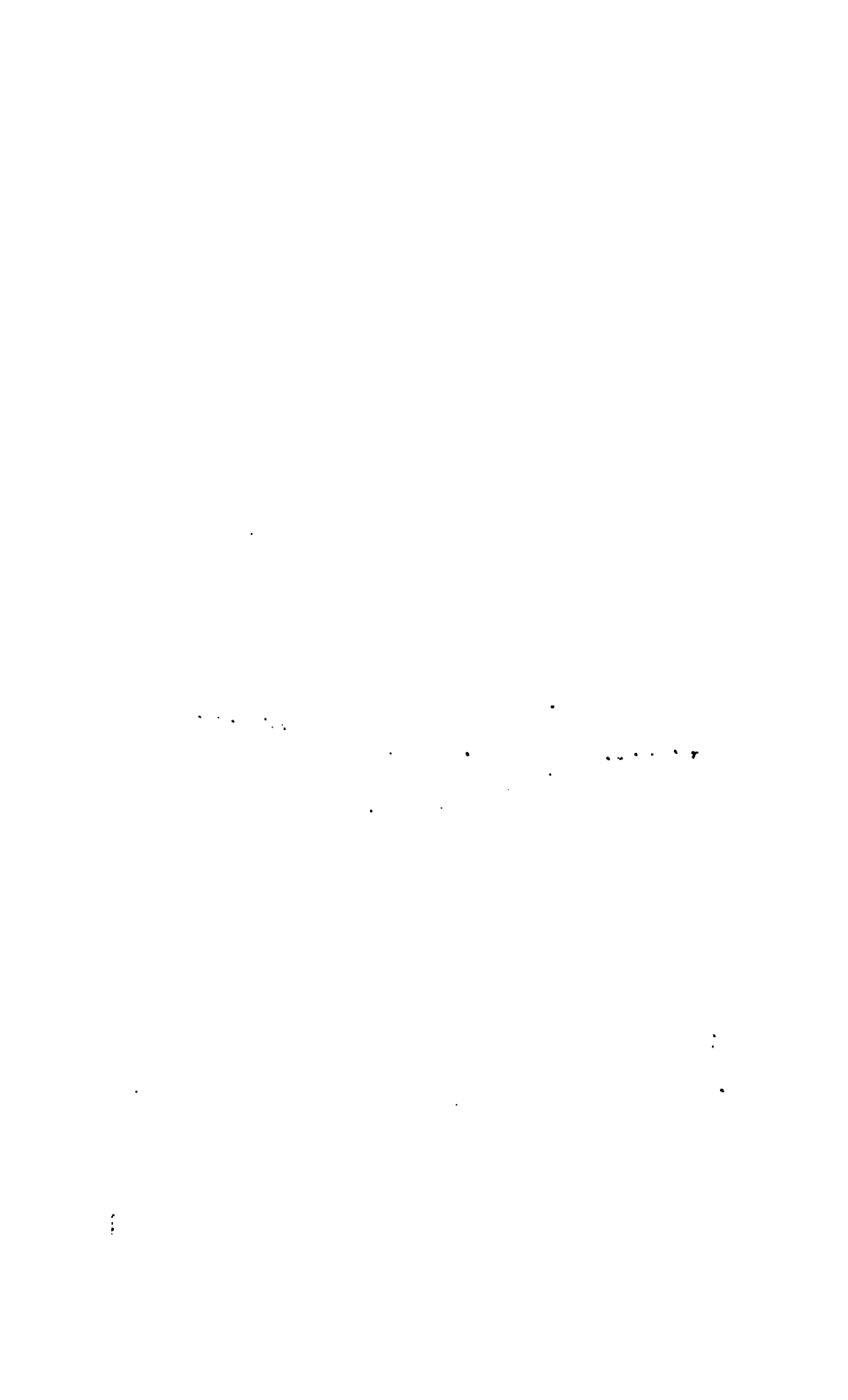




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# SERMON I.

WALKING BY FAITH.

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2 COR. v. 7.

WE WALK BY FAITH, AND NOT BY SIGHT.

IN this chapter the Apostle is treating of the immortality of man. With great confidence, he expresses his hope of a future state of happiness. Nevertheless, he adds, we walk by faith, and not by sight. That is, this immortality is not a matter of knowledge, but of belief. We cannot demonstrate it, though we are firmly persuaded of its truth. The assertion of the Apostle is not applicable to a future state only; but in almost all the doctrines of revealed religion, we walk by faith and not by sight. Absolute knowledge, in few cases, is granted to us; what we believe may be probable, but it is not certain; for here we see through a glass darkly, and know in part. In a future world we hope to enjoy perfect knowledge; but the present world is in some measure a scene of obscurity.

As a consideration of this subject is adapted to make us cautious, humble, and candid, it deserves



attention. At the same time, it is of importance to show that the prejudices, which are entertained against religion on this account, are ill-founded ; for if we walk by faith in religion, we are guided by the same light in almost every thing else. We ought not therefore to object against revelation, because it cannot be demonstrated ; for demonstration is not afforded us in other subjects.

Man, however, anxiously wishes for certainty in every thing of importance ; and when he does not possess it, is disposed to complain. Why has not God made what we are to believe so plain and evident, as that all doubts should be prevented ? is a common inquiry. Why has he not revealed himself so clearly, as that we should be as certain of his existence as of our own ? Why do we, not only believe, but know, that he is *one* being, who is infinitely powerful, wise, and good, the creator of heaven and earth, and the judge of men ? Why are we not enabled absolutely to determine, whether Jesus Christ is a pre-existent being, or only a man ? Why do we not certainly know, whether or not, he is an object of prayer ? Why have we not more than probable evidence of the truth of Christianity ? Why are men permitted to dispute about the meaning of its doctrines ? Why is there such obscurity in the language of the sacred writers, as that controversies should exist concerning the trinity, the atonement of Christ, original sin, predes-

tion, and everlasting punishment? Why do we not understand St. Paul as well as he understood himself? and why should it be possible that so many different explanations can be made of his words? In particular, why do we not know that we are immortal? Why have we not such evidence, as that it would be impossible to doubt of a future state? Why does not a ghost return from the other world, or a dead man rise, and make this important doctrine certain? We are frequently told, that we shall be punished hereafter for the deeds done in the body: we wish that we absolutely knew this; for certain knowledge would have a greater influence on our conduct, than mere faith, however lively it may be. We have also heard that we shall meet our virtuous friends in a better state: If we were certain of this, we should see them die with more resignation.

Such language as this is natural to man. There are few of us, who have not felt it and spoken it in our hearts. In particular, when we have been inquiring after truth, when we have been disputing concerning any doctrine of revealed religion, when we have been defending Christianity against the objections of infidels, and have found how easy it is to involve the subject in obscurity, we have ardently wished that a voice from heaven, or some other proof, which might infallibly be depended on, would decide the controversy at once and remove every doubt.

May we not say, that the goodness of God would vouchsafe us the demonstration which we desire, if it was proper or possible? But he does not in fact; we live the life of faith, and not of knowledge: such is the constitution of things. Satisfied that whatever God does is right, I conceive that it is our duty, not to complain of this system, and to wish that it might be altered, but to endeavour to find out its reasons. Let us therefore inquire, why it is that God causes us to walk by faith, and not by sight: after which let us attempt to show, that from this constitution of things advantages result, which we could not enjoy, if, in every case, we possessed absolute knowledge.

I. The most important doctrine of religion is, that there is one God of infinite perfection, by whose power we were created, by whose providence we are preserved, whom therefore we are bound to love, to worship, and obey, and to whom we are accountable for all our conduct. This truth is proved by the strongest probable arguments, the evidence of which is nearly irresistible. It does not amount however to strict demonstration. There have been persons who have doubted of the being of God; which shows that this truth is not as certain as mathematical propositions; for no man can, or does doubt of them. Here then some may be ready to desire that the Supreme Being had reveal-

ed himself more fully ; so that we might not only rationally believe, but absolutely know, that he exists.

But it may be asked, how could this have been done ? As God is infinite, it is impossible that he should become the object of any one of our senses. We could not be made to see or feel *him*, who has neither parts, nor limits, nor form, nor colour, nor motion. We see his works ; and he has given us understanding, by which, when it is properly directed, we are capable of discerning their contrivance, beauty, and harmony, and of perceiving that they must have an author of great power and wisdom. The visible world manifests to the well-tutored eye, that there is a God ; but so sublime an idea as that of a Deity would not of itself enter the uninstructed mind. On the contrary, it is probable that men are indebted for their first knowledge of this truth to a divine communication, or to a tradition, derived from this source. Revelation informs us that the world was produced by an intelligent cause. But revelation is not an object of knowledge, but of faith. Even then with respect to the being of a God, the most important of all truths, we walk by faith, and not by sight ; and it seems not possible that it could otherwise be.

We believe that God has made a revelation of himself in the sacred Scriptures, and that to them we are indebted for our notions of religious and

moral truths. Now it is evident to any person, who attentively considers the nature of it, that it was not easy nor practicable to make it an object of knowledge. Revelation is contained in a certain number of books, all of them written near two thousand years since. The authority of them, who delivered its doctrines, was confirmed by miracles, or evidences of supernatural power. Our acquaintance with these facts is derived from the testimony of the Apostles and others, whom we have reason to believe were intelligent, impartial, and sincere witnesses. They knew that what they declared was true ; but it is impossible that we should know it in the same manner, or have any thing more than a probable proof of it, unless God had continued a series of miracles from that age to the present, which would produce more bad than good effects.

These books were written by men, in the languages with which they were familiar ; which, like all other human languages, are imperfect and contain words which are used in different senses, and abound with figurative modes of expression, the precise meaning of which cannot always be ascertained. These languages are unknown to us : and before we can read the Scriptures in our own tongues, we are obliged to procure translations of them, made by fallible and uninspired men. From these causes and others of the same kind there are obscurities in these books ; and the consequence is,

that Christians of different sects do not understand all their doctrines in the same sense. We may add, that every part of the Scriptures is not equally clear. The preceptive parts are plain; but the opinions of the Apostles and their reasonings are sometimes dark and hard to be understood. Perhaps also the first disciples, who immediately succeeded the Apostles, were not perfectly uniform in their ideas on points of less importance. They agree in their general doctrines: but it was not necessary that they should agree in every minute article of their creeds; and as they were men like ourselves, nothing short of a perpetual miracle could have produced this perfect unity of sentiment. Why then should we complain, that with respect to revelation, we are obliged to walk by faith, and not by sight? Is not this complaining that men are made as they are? Is it not finding fault with the natural imperfection of the human understanding and requiring that God should change the constitution of things?

An extensive inquiry into the nature of Christianity and a laboured delineation of its evidences would show, that probability must be the foundation on which it rests. This task, however, would demand, not a single discourse, but volumes. The hints which I have given manifest, that it is vain to expect mathematical demonstration in so complicated an argument.

It may still be urged, that we have a right to require positive proof of the immortality of man. Here we ought to be indulged with the clearest sight ; because the doctrine, if true, is of the highest importance, as it is intimately connected with our virtue and happiness.

But let us not be hasty in requiring this proof. If man is immortal, it must be in consequence of the free gift of God. He has no right to demand immortality ; and there are few arguments from nature which lead him to expect it. On the supposition that there is in man a spiritual substance distinct from his body, how could its existence be proved ? For as it is not material, it cannot be made either visible or palpable. To require therefore that spirits should appear, to demonstrate to us the immortality of the soul, is demanding an impossibility. But if our immortality depends on the resurrection of the dead, our idea of it must be the same as that of revelation itself : it must be faith, and not sight. If we believe the New Testament to be the word of God, as we may rationally do, we can entertain no reasonable doubt of it ; but as we cannot obtain absolute demonstration of the one, so neither can we strictly demonstrate the other.

II. These observations may show, that the constitution of things, by which we are made to walk by faith and not by sight, cannot easily be changed.

There are advantages resulting from this system, which we could not enjoy, if, in every case, we possessed absolute knowledge.

One,—and it is of great importance,—is, that by the present constitution of things, the understanding is sharpened and improved, employment is found for the mind, and man is rendered active. If all truths were certain, man would lead a life of indolence. There would be an end of inquiry, of debate, of criticism; almost all the books in the world would be annihilated; and the learned professions would be extinct. In a word, we should have nothing to do but to open our eyes, and receive the light which was poured in upon them. Some persons may conceive that such a state would be better than the present. But they, who have this imagination, have never tasted the pleasure, which is derived from a minute examination of an intricate subject, in which knowledge is obtained and truth discovered by degrees. There is a satisfaction, a self-complacence in exercising the reasoning powers, which permits us not to regret the want of absolute knowledge. When the judgment is employed in investigating our own ideas, in separating truth from falsehood, which are so intimately blended in almost all subjects, in exploding error, in deducing new truths from truths already believed, or even in probable conjecture, a delight is experienced, which would be altogether unknown,



if every proposition was immediately clear and certain.

How pleasing is it, for example, to follow the arguments of such a noble and wonderful book as Butler's Analogy, and to trace the complicated evidences of Christianity in the profound works of the preachers at the Boylean Lectures! If the truths of the gospel were self-evident, the world would never have seen those learned apologies, which, in all ages, have done honour to the church, and which have so highly exalted the minds, not only of their authors, but of their readers.

Another advantage resulting from this constitution of things, is, that it furnishes us with an opportunity of exercising humility, candour, and forbearance.

As we walk by faith and not by sight, we ought to be humble and modest in our opinions. We ought not to assert any thing too positively, as we may, notwithstanding all our inquiries, be in an error. We ought to keep our minds open to conviction, and to the reception of new ideas, however contrary they may be to the notions, which we have formerly entertained. We should be sensible of the imperfection of our knowledge, and think, and reason, and act, with that caution, which becomes beings, who are absolutely certain of very few truths.

In consequence of this system, by which we are made to walk by faith and not by sight, there is a variety of opinions among Christians. Almost all subjects can be viewed in different lights, and are attended with obscurities. This variety need not produce any ill effects; for as Christians agree in the essential point, the necessity of loving God and our neighbour, the interest of virtue is secure upon every system; but it affords an opportunity of displaying candour and forbearance. There is nothing more amiable than liberality and indulgence toward them, who differ from us in opinion. If we all believed exactly the same things, our benevolence would not be so meritorious; for we naturally love them, who resemble us; but to love them, whom we think erroneous, is generous, is charitable.

On the whole, from a view of the subject, it appears, that in religion, it is proper that we should walk by faith, and not by sight. But this system, whether it is right or wrong, is analogous to all the other dispensations of divine Providence. In nature, in government, in civil and domestick life, in agriculture, and in every kind of business, it is no less true, than in religion, that we walk by faith and not by sight. The statesman, who, with the experience and accumulated wisdom of preceding ages, forms a constitution of government, cannot promise himself more than a probability of suc-

## SERMON II.

RULES TO BE OBSERVED IN EXAMINING THE EVIDENCES OF  
THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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MATTH. xi. 3.

ART THOU HE THAT SHOULD COME?

WHETHER the Christian religion is a divine revelation, or the invention of man, is one of the most important questions, which can be offered to our consideration. This question has been agitated during many ages ; but notwithstanding all the arguments, which the wise and the learned have been able to produce in favour of the gospel, there are still some persons, by whom it is disbelieved. It is not my design in this discourse to undertake the demonstration of its truth, but only to show with what disposition of mind its evidences ought to be examined. Accordingly I will offer several rules, which appear to me so clear and certain, that I think every rational man will assent to them, or at least to the greatest part of them, as soon as they are proposed. The example of John, the Baptist, who, with an honest and good heart, asked the question contained in the text, and who received

from Jesus the satisfaction, which his candour and integrity deserved, confirms these rules, and is worthy of the imitation of all, who are inquiring into the truth of the Christian religion.

1. The first rule which I offer is, that the evidences of the Christian religion ought to be examined with seriousness. We are serious in considering any question, which is important, and where we think our interest is concerned. If we have a voyage to plan, a house to build, or an estate to purchase, we do not view the subject with a trifling mind or a superficial attention. We make use of foresight and precaution ; and we are careful not to commit a mistake, or to form a false judgment. In discussing any political question, where we suppose the good of our country, or our personal freedom and welfare are concerned, we are equally serious. The affair is too momentous to leave our minds in vacancy and ease ; and whether our object is to secure the election of a favourite candidate for office, or to promote any publick measure, which in our opinion involves the independence and prosperity of our nation, our bosoms are filled with deep concern, and thoughts of levity are totally excluded. Now that religion is more important than any of the business of this world, is what no person of reflection will deny. If the Christian religion is true, we are immortal beings, and our happiness or mise-

ry in another state depends on our good or bad conduct in the state which now is. It behooves us therefore to examine the subject with care, and with all the solemnity and interest, which its magnitude demands.

The great enemy of seriousness is a propensity to ridicule, and too strong a love of wit and humour. These abuses proceed from the perversion of a part of our constitution, which our Maker has bestowed on us with a wise and benevolent design. As man is the noblest, so he is also the only risible animal, with which we are acquainted. God has given him tears to quench his grief, when his soul is burning with affliction; and smiles to brighten his face, when his heart is merry. But it was never intended that his mirth should be a substitute for his reason, or that he should indulge himself in laughter, where the exercise of his judgment is required. Wit and humour are the amusements of life, and not the guides to knowledge. In the hands of a master, they may sometimes render a truth more striking, or a falsehood more glaring; but they are not arguments, though they are often found to make more impression on the minds of the superficial than the strongest demonstration. If these observations are just, it may be concluded, that nothing can be more false than the maxim which Shaftesbury has given, that ridicule is the test of truth. By ridicule we understand a jest, a

mockery ; or, to give a more favourable definition of the word, it is wit of that species, which provokes laughter. According to Shaftesbury then, nothing can be true, against which a laugh can be raised. Now experience shows, that a man of a sprightly imagination and ready invention can easily make any thing appear ridiculous ; and if we attend to the nature of wit, or rather to those kinds of it, which are denominated humour and ridicule, it will appear that the most important truths are not exempted from his power. The effect of ridicule is produced chiefly, if not altogether, by unexpected associations of terms. When words, which never met before, are suddenly brought together, there is produced a degree of surprise, which amuses the mind. The effect will be the most striking, when what is very high is associated with what is very low. The sublime truths of religion therefore can readily be turned into ridicule, by connecting them with mean and contemptible language. But a man of correct judgment, who wishes to discover the right path, will always be on his guard against being diverted by this art. He will attend principally, not to the humour of the author whom he reads, or the speaker whom he hears, but to his arguments. I am sorry to say, that the writers against the Christian religion in modern times have generally followed the maxim of Shaftesbury. Of English deists not more than three or four can be named, who

superstition of its misjudging professors. Many objections, which have been deemed formidable, apply not to the gospel itself, but to its corruptions. Christianity may be true, though the doctrines of purgatory and transubstantiation are not true ; though it is not true that they, who differ in opinion from the majority, ought to be burned as hereticks ; and though it is not true that the power of the clergy ought to be raised, as it was in the dark ages of the church, to such an enormous height, as to endanger the liberties of the people and the safety of empires. I instance in corruptions, which are foreign to our sentiments : but are there not among ourselves doctrines, which are no parts of divine revelation, and which prejudice against it enlightened understandings ? An intelligent inquirer, before he rejects it, ought carefully to examine, whether the fact is not so ; and whether there may not be sufficient reason to embrace the Christian religion, though he does not admit the absurd opinions, which have been maintained by its erroneous advocates.

5. A fifth rule, connected with the foregoing, is, that in examining the evidences of Christianity, we ought to view it, as it exists in the documents, in which it was originally delivered. I mean not that every man is under obligations to study the Greek and Hebrew languages. In the present improved state of knowledge, this study is unnecessary ; be-

cause he can easily procure books, which will enable him to ascertain the genuine reading of the ancient text, as well as its true interpretation. The translations, which were made of the Scriptures two centuries ago, abound with errors; for Christians at that time were too full of prejudices, and were too much controlled by kingly and clerical authority, to be able to give a correct version; and yet, though these circumstances ought to be known by every man, who has any pretensions to learning, infidels have sometimes not been ashamed to deduce from such erroneous translations objections against the truth of divine revelation.

6. A sixth rule is, that in examining the evidences of the Christian religion, we ought not to reject it, because futile arguments have sometimes been alleged in its favour by weak writers. As all sorts of persons have undertaken to defend the truth of the gospel, it is not to be wondered at, that some of its professed advocates should have injured the cause, which they intended to benefit. But a system may be true, and may have a hundred strong arguments to support it, though injudicious authors may vainly add ten or a dozen feeble proofs; as an edifice may stand firm on its foundation of stone, though the wooden pilasters on its walls contribute nothing to its strength. When infidels triumphantly urge against Christians, Such a proof is worth



nothing, provided it is really weak, they should reply, True, it is worth nothing ; but there are, nevertheless, arguments, which are as hard as adamant, and which you cannot resist.

7. Finally, another rule is, that we ought not to satisfy ourselves with a superficial examination of the evidences of Christianity ; because the arguments, which are supposed to establish its truth, are many in number and complicated in their nature. The leading proofs, which Christians allege in favour of their religion, may be summed up in a few words as follow : i. Prophecy. ii. Miracles. iii. The internal evidence, or the purity of its doctrines and the excellence of its precepts. iv. The unexampled perfection of the character of Jesus. v. The testimony of the Apostles and other primitive witnesses. vi. A chain of tradition, formed by the writings of a succession of authors, from the first to the present century, and which establishes the authenticity and credibility of the books of the New Testament. These several arguments consist of a variety of parts, which afford each other support. To the evidences of the New Testament must be added the proofs of the Old Testament ; because the two books are so intimately connected, that they must stand or fall together ; for the Christian religion is a system, which professes to begin at the creation, and to be continued down to the resti-

tution of all things. A knowledge of so many particulars cannot be obtained without careful inquiry and diligent investigation. As the evidences of Christianity are thus complicated in their nature, so the objections, which are alleged against it, are also multifarious; for there is scarcely any part of it, which has not been attacked by infidels. A man, who doubts of its truth, has therefore much to do; but he cannot be said to possess a pure and upright mind, unless he gives to every question relating to it the attention, which is due to its importance.

To these observations it may be objected, that if they are just, Christianity must be a system, which is not designed for the world in general; because the majority of mankind, and in particular the common people, have neither leisure nor capacity for such minute attention. I answer: It is not required of them. Experience manifests, that the greatest part of men are intended, not for speculation, but action. If the Christian religion is true, its practical effects, to the man who believes it, must be the same, whether he is able to demonstrate its truth, or not; as the mathematical tables, by which the navigator finds his way across the ocean, are equally safe guides, whether he does, or does not, understand their theory. He is a good Christian, who practises the duties, which the gospel commands; who educates his children in the principles of piety, temperance, and honesty; who prays to God in his

house, trusts in his mercy, and believes in Christ ; who on the seventh day joins the publick worship of the church ; and during the rest of the week performs his part as a man, a citizen, a husband, and a father ; he is a good Christian, though he never reads any book except the Bible, and never heard of a deist or an atheist. But if by any cause he is led to speculate and doubt, he ought not to stop. A little learning will intoxicate his brain : to restore the sobriety of his mind, he must drink copious draughts from the fountain of theological science. If he reads the works of deistical writers, he must also read the best answers, which have been made to them : if he studies Hume, and Gibbon, and Paine, he must also study Campbell, and Watson, and Priestley.

In concluding the subject, I know not, whether I ought to give another rule, that to our diligence, seriousness, candour, and impartiality, we should add prayer to God. I hesitate, I say, whether to offer this rule, or not ; because the infidel may be unwilling to admit its propriety, as he must the justice of all the rest. But if he will not pray, he must at least wish, that the divine Being, who formed the human soul, and who is acquainted with all its motions, would enlighten his understanding, and guide it into the path of truth. If he has an honest and good heart, he must ardently desire to know,

whether the gospel is a fiction, or the genuine word of God. You, my brethren, who already believe the Christian religion, rejoice that you are perplexed with none of these doubts. You have a firm persuasion, that your heavenly Father hears your prayers ; and that, as he bestows on you all necessary good things, so in particular he gives to you his holy spirit, when you ask for it with sincerity, humility, and devotion.

*3d S. in Advent.*

## SERMON III.

CHARACTER OF A WISE AND AMIABLE WOMAN.

---

ISAIAH xxx. 26.

THE LIGHT OF THE MOON SHALL BE AS THE LIGHT OF THE  
SUN.

THE contemplation of the various natural objects, which God has created, impresses this idea on the mind, that many of them are formed for beauty, as well as utility. Without regarding the advantages, which flow from them, they afford pleasure by their colour, circular or undulating lines, or harmony of proportions. Of these natural objects, there are few which are more delightful, and there are none which excite more attention, than the gentle luminary, which extends its sway over the night: it charms both the eye and the fancy. Hence in all ages, the poet and the orator, who have written to the imaginations of men, have enriched their compositions with metaphors and comparisons derived from its reflected beams. The most elegant simile in the Iliad is one of this kind; and I need not point out instances in modern writers of beautiful imagery, which, like the rays of the globe from

which they are borrowed, shed a mild lustre over their language and sentiments.

The text presents us with an agreeable image, a light, which is soft and gentle, like the moon ; but which, at the same time, without being dazzling to the eye, is constant like the sun. It has suggested to me the design of describing a character, to which it bears a resemblance.

Of human characters there is a great variety, both among women and among men. Of women, one has been compared to a flower, which is beautiful, but the bloom of which soon passes away. Another, says the great Cervantes, resembles a delicate vase of glass : it is free from a speck ; but wanting firmness, it is broken in pieces by the first stroke of temptation. One woman is like a temporary torrent, noisy and shallow ; while another resembles a perennial and silent fountain. Of men, one may be compared to a volcano, which hurls fire and destruction around. Another man stands immovable, like a lofty mountain : eternal ice chills his head, and sharp-pointed rocks and horrid precipices encompass his heart ; but he benefits the world by the mines of knowledge, which are contained in his bosom, or by the streams of science, which rush down from his summit. One man, like a meteor, with his intense flame, threatens to outshine all the stars in the sky, and to fill every soul with wonder ;

but he blazes for a moment only, and then sinks into profound darkness. Another man, like the sun, with his genius enlightens the universe ; but so brilliant are his talents, and so powerful his rays, that he almost blinds the eye, which cannot follow him without pain, as he runs his rapid course from one end of the heavens to the other.

The character, which I undertake to describe, is of a different cast. It can be contemplated with ease and satisfaction ; and whilst it is universally loved, it excites admiration without awe. This character belongs to a wise, discreet, and amiable woman. I will endeavour to make it a general character ; and will borrow its features from many excellent women, whom I have known ; from some, who are still alive ; and from others, who are numbered among the dead. My design in the delineation is to recommend certain virtues, and to censure the opposite vices.

The woman, whom I would exhibit to your view, possesses a sound understanding. She is virtuous, not from impulse, instinct, and a childish simplicity ; for she knows that evil exists, as well as good ; but she abhors the former, and resolutely chooses the latter. As she has carefully weighed the nature and consequences of her actions, her moral principles are fixed ; and she has deliberately formed a plan of life, to which she conscientiously adheres.

Her character is her own ; her knowledge and virtues are original ; and are not the faint copies of another character. Convinced that the duty of every human being consists in performing well the part, which is assigned by divine Providence, she directs her principal attention to this object ; and whether as a wife, a mother, or the head of a family, she is always diligent and discreet. She is exempt from affectation, the folly of little minds. Far from her heart is the desire of acquiring a reputation, or of rendering herself interesting, by imbecilities and imperfections. Thus she is delicate, but not timid : she has too much good sense ever to be afraid where is no danger ; and she leaves the affectation of terroure to women, who, from the want of a correct education, are ignorant of what is truly becoming. She is still farther removed from the affectation of sensibility : she has sympathy and tears for the calamities of her friends ; but there is no artificial whining on her tongue ; nor does she ever manifest more grief than she really feels. In so enlightened an understanding humility appears with peculiar grace. Every wise woman must be humble ; because every wise woman must know, that no human being has any thing to be proud of. The gifts, which she possesses, she has received : she cannot therefore glory in them, as if they were of her own creation. There is no ostentation in any part of her behaviour : she does not affect to con-



ceal her virtues and talents, but she never ambitiously displays them. She is still more pleasingly adorned with the graces of mildness and gentleness. Her manners are placid, the tones of her voice are sweet, and her eye benignant ; because her heart is meek and kind. From the combination of these virtues arises that general effect, which is denominated loveliness, a quality, which renders her the object of the complacency of all her friends, and the delight of every one who approaches her. Believing that she was born, not for herself only, but for others, she endeavours to communicate happiness to all who are around her, in particular to her intimate connexions. Her children, those immortal beings, who are committed to her care, that they may be formed to knowledge and virtue, are the principal objects of her attention. She sows in their minds the seeds of piety and goodness ; she waters them with the dew of heavenly instruction ; and she eradicates every weed of evil, as soon as it appears. Thus does she benefit the church, her country, and the world, by training up sincere Christians, useful citizens, and good men. It is scarcely necessary to observe, that with so benevolent a heart, she remembers the poor, and that she affords them, not only pity, but substantial relief. As she is a wise woman, who is not afraid to exercise her understanding, her experience and observation soon convince her, that the world, though it

abounds with many pleasures, is not an unmixed state of enjoyment. Whilst therefore she is careful to bring no misfortunes on herself by imprudence, folly, and extravagance, she looks with a calm and steady eye on the unavoidable afflictions, through which she is doomed to pass; and she arms her mind with fortitude, that she may endure with resolution and cheerfulness the severest trials. When sickness and distress at last come, she submits to them with patience and resignation. A peevish complaint does not escape from her lips; nor does she once murmur, because the hand of her heavenly Father lies heavy upon her. She is, if possible, more serene, more mild, more gentle, on the bed of disease, than she was in the seasons of health and felicity. So affectionate is she to her surrounding friends, and so grateful for the attentions, which they pay to her, that they almost forget, that she suffers any pain. The love of God crowns all her virtues: religion is deeply fixed in her heart; but here, as in all her behaviour, she is without parade. Her piety is sincere and ardent, but humble and retired. She attends only to the essentials of religion, and leaves doubtful controversies to angry theologians, who more highly value the doctrines of their particular creeds, by which they are distinguished from other men, than the duties of the gospel, which belong to all Christians. A mind, in which strength and gentleness are thus united, may be compared

to the soft light of the moon, which shines with the perpetual rays of the sun. We are at first view ready to imagine that it is more lovely than great, more charming than dignified ; but we soon become convinced, that it is filled with true wisdom, and endowed with noble purposes.

Such a character can be formed no where but in a civilized country, and in a country which is blessed with the light of the gospel. Among savage nations women are the slaves of the stronger sex ; among the ancient heathen they were subjected to disgraceful tyranny ; and in the present age, among nations, who are unacquainted with the Christian religion, they are deprived of personal freedom, and are nothing more than beautiful birds confined in cages. Whatever reason, therefore, men may think they have for wishing, that the arts of civilization were lost, or that the licentiousness of paganism would return, women would lose every thing by such a change. The religion of Jesus is of infinite importance to women ; and it should be precious in their eyes, and dear to their hearts. If men therefore, puffed up with the pride of skeptical philosophy, dispute the pretensions of its author, let not women, whose refined sensibility frequently leads them directly to truth, refuse to admit his claims : if men will not have the Prince of peace to reign over them, let women cheerfully submit to

his rightful dominion. The Christian religion restores to women all their rights, and establishes their equality with man in every thing which is valuable. From the dishonourable condition of being one slave among many of the same haughty lord, it raises them to the rank of being the single companion, and the only complete and perpetual friend of their husbands ; of being equal sharers with them in the same property and privileges, in the same labours and cares, in the same sorrows and joys. It confers on them the right of being the children of the same God, the disciples of the same Master, and the heirs of the same salvation. They should therefore adhere to it as the charter of their freedom, which not only makes them good, but which also renders them happy. The Christian religion refines and ennobles all who receive it ; but it is in particular adapted to the character and habits of the female sex. Women are, almost by nature, humble, gentle, pure, faithful, affectionate, and compassionate, and more distinguished for passive, than active, courage ; and these are the virtues, which the gospel every where enjoins. It lays no stress on the false virtues, which are supposed to adorn savages and pagans ; on no virtue, which is merely masculine, but on those virtues only, which can be performed by every human being.

During the course of my life, I have seen many instances of the triumphs of this divine

religion in the female heart ; and I doubt not, my brethren, that I express sentiments, which you feel, when I say you rejoice in having passed your days among Christian women. You remember with pleasure and gratitude the affection, which watched over your infancy ; the tender solicitude, which guided your youth ; and the conversation which has charmed, the friendship which has blessed, and the many virtues which have edified, your riper years. These pleasing recollections are however imbittered with the thought, that many excellent women, whom you have known, and esteemed, and loved, now sleep in the grave. If there was not a future state of happiness, you could with difficulty support their loss : but whilst as Christians you believe, that the precious remains, which have been committed to the dust, will again be animated with life, and restored to bliss, you can with reason indulge the hope, that you shall see them again, not shining, as on earth, with feeble and reflected light ; but when, in a more emphatical meaning of the text, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days ; when the ransomed of the Lord shall come to the holy mountain with songs and everlasting joy on their heads ; when they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

4th S. in Advent.

## SERMON IV.

OLD AGE.

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PSALMS xcii. 14.

THEY SHALL STILL BRING FORTH FRUIT IN OLD AGE.

IF we expand the metaphor of the text into a simile, we may say, that the Psalmist compares human life to a fruit tree, which exhibits different appearances, as it is variously affected by the progressive seasons of the year. As the tree in spring produces blossoms, which become fruit in summer, and ripe fruit in autumn : so man, in his childhood, which resembles spring, brings forth the beautiful flowers of promise ; in his youth, which resembles summer, the fruits of wisdom and virtue are beginning to be formed, and every day gradually increase in size ; in his manhood, which resembles autumn, his intellectual and moral character is ripe, and he now gathers the reward of his labours. When we arrive at winter, the comparison no longer runs parallel ; for the tree brings forth neither blossoms nor fruit in December ; whilst in old age, which, as it is the last and coldest period of life, in

some points resembles it, fruit may still be produced ; the fruit of happiness, and the fruit of duty. We are now in the midst of the shortest days of the year : no subject therefore appears to me more proper for the season than old age, the winter of life. It is my intention, first, to show that long life, which must of necessity terminate in old age, is a blessing ; and secondly to mention several duties, which become the aged.

I. Long life is a blessing. The blessings which we most ardently desire are health, riches, and long life. Without health all other enjoyments would be of little value. Riches are desired for the sake of enabling us to procure every other pleasure ; for he who has wealth, it is supposed, can purchase with it whatever is necessary to his happiness. But even health and riches would not be much prized, if they were to be of short continuance. It is therefore ever our fervent prayer, May I be blessed with a long life ! However disposed we may sometimes be to inveigh against the world, we are willing to remain in it ; and however prone to consider life as full of evil, we quit it with regret. Though we are too ready on every occasion peevishly to quarrel with it, yet we still cherish it, like an old friend whom we fondly love. That these are the sentiments of nature, your own feelings, my brethren, will confirm : and in this light is long life represent-

ed in the ancient scriptures. When the happiness of a favourite of heaven is described in the Old Testament, this particular blessing is enumerated among the others which he possessed. Thus does Moses speak of the founder of the Jewish nation, a man who was distinguished for the felicity of his life : Abraham, says he, died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years. This reward also was one of the most eminent, by which God incited his people to obey his commands : Honour thy father and mother, that thy days may be long in the land. The like reward was annexed to many other precepts ; for the Mosaick religion, as has been often observed, was founded principally, if not altogether, on temporal promises. In the Old Testament, it is true, there are many complaints of the vanity and misery of the world : but still it seems to be a conceded point, that life is a favour, and consequently that a long life is to be wished for and thankfully received. You, my brethren, who have reached the period of old age, ought therefore to acknowledge the goodness of God : and you, who enjoy the happiness of having a beloved friend continued with you for many years, ought to be grateful to Heaven.

The natural age of man is said by the best writers on the human frame to be about ninety years ; that is, a man of a robust constitution, whose life was passed in temperance, and without disease, would, if



no dangerous accident intervened, attain this period, and then die of old age. In this country we see many instances of persons, who reach this term and even beyond it ; which demonstrates that the observation is founded on experience. But human life is subject to so many maladies, that the Psalmist has thought proper to fix the period of it to seventy, or at farthest to eighty years. We generally consider a person as having been favoured with long life who dies at the age of seventy, though it is evidently far short of the natural age of man.

In asserting that long life is a blessing, it must be taken for granted, that life in general has a balance of enjoyments in its favour. But of this fact there cannot be much doubt. There are, it is true, in the world many positive evils, which, as they are the constant topicks of declamation, I need not enumerate. Beside which it must be allowed, that amidst the most flourishing external prosperity, the heart of man is never fully satisfied. What he possesses never answers his expectations ; and there is always something wanting which he cannot obtain. No person of experience therefore will assert, that man is or can be completely happy in this world : and they who are disposed to turn their attention too much on themselves, and who refine with a morbid kind of sensibility on the nature of human felicity, will be apt to believe that misery greatly preponderates. But excepting them, who

preposterously lay every nerve bare to the touch of pain, the human race have not much to complain of. God has so benevolently constructed both the natural and moral world, that there are innumerable sources of happiness. Our senses are the inlets of pleasure ; and our minds, a vast magazine of enjoyment. Now I say that these enjoyments are not confined to youth, but that old age is admitted to its share. The senses may be in some degree blunted by age ; but their sensibility is not destroyed. The taste, smell, and touch are still gratified with the objects adapted to them ; melodious sounds still charm the ear ; and brilliant, beautiful, and sublime objects still delight the eye. Intellectual pleasures of the more refined species are perhaps increased, as we advance in years. For it is the nature of man when his powers are rightly improved, to begin with matter, and to end with spirit. Knowledge, where industry is continued, and the faculties are not impaired, though many things are forgotten which were learned in youth, must be gradually enlarged till the close of life. The same thing is true of virtue ; for like all other habits, it must become more and more confirmed by repeated acts. Children are innocent ; but they cannot properly speaking be styled virtuous : they are all body, and all their wishes and enjoyments terminate in themselves. By proper instructions and examples they may indeed be gradually led to the ac-

quisition of benevolence ; but the habit cannot be considered as fixed, nor man as out of danger of relapsing into selfishness, till the period of youth is in some measure passed, and the fever of passion and appetite are abated. In old age the character is settled on a firm basis ; and the enlightened and good man is then reaping the fruits of his exertions. In this view therefore a long life must be regarded as a distinguished blessing.

If we look around among our acquaintance, we shall find these observations confirmed by experience : we shall perceive many old persons, whose days flow on with much satisfaction, and who at the age of eighty, and even ninety years, are pleasant companions, instructive friends, and useful members of society. In conversing with them, we are reading the chronicles of other times : and it is pleasant to listen to their recital of past events, and to receive the counsels of their wisdom and experience.

The young, who all wish to live, but who at the same time have a dread at growing old, may not be disposed to allow the justice of this representation. They regard old age as a dreary season, which admits of nothing which can be called pleasure, and very little which deserves the name even of comfort. They look forward to it, as in autumn we anticipate the approach of winter ; but winter, though it terrifies us at a distance, has nothing very formidable, when it arrives. Its enjoyments are of

a different kind ; but we find it not less pleasant than any other season of the year. In like manner old age, frightful as it may be to the young, who view it far off, has no terrour to them who see it near ; but experience proves that it abounds with many consolations, and even delights. We should look therefore with pleasure on many old men, whose illuminated faces and hoary heads resemble one of those pleasant days in winter, so common in this climate, when a bright sun darts its beams on a pure field of snow. The beauty of spring, the splendour of summer, and the glory of autumn are gone ; but the prospect is still lively and cheerful.

Among other circumstances which contribute to the satisfaction of this period of life, is the respect with which old age is treated. There are, it must be acknowledged and lamented, some foolish and ill-educated young persons, who do not pay that veneration which is due to the hoary head ; but these examples are not numerous. The world in general bows down to age, gives it precedence, and listens with deference to its opinions. Old age wants accommodations ; and it must in justice to men be allowed that they are afforded with cheerfulness. Who can deny that such reverence is soothing to the human mind ? and that it compensates for the loss of many pleasures which are peculiar to youth ?

The respect of the world in general is gratifying ; but the respect of a man's own offspring must yield heart-felt delight. Can there be a more pleasing sight, than a venerable old man surrounded by his children and grandchildren, all of whom are emulous in testifying their homage and affection ! His children, proud of their honoured father, strive who shall treat him with the most attention, whilst his grandchildren hang on his neck, entertain him with their innocent prattle, and convince him that they love their grandfather even more than they love their father. After viewing such a scene, can we possibly believe that it is not a blessing to live long ? and yet no spectacle is more common.

God has so constituted our nature, that we are made happy, not by loving ourselves, but by loving others : In proportion as we diffuse our affection, our bliss increases ; but the virtuous old man generally enjoys this blessing. His life, his affections, and his sympathies are augmented by every child who descends from him. Is not his complacency as great as it is rational, when he surveys his offspring, and sees that they do credit to the pains, which he bestowed on their education ; that their heads are adorned with knowledge, and their hearts warmed with religion and virtue ? How many instances however of aged parents could we mention, who feel this satisfaction !

Again, a long life is a blessing, because it enables a man to perform much for the good of society. Genius, knowledge, and industry, under the guidance of wisdom and philanthropy, may greatly promote the welfare of mankind ; but even they can effect little, unless aided by time. How few things can be done in a life, which is confined within the narrow limits of thirty or forty years ! A man may indeed then begin many excellent plans ; but he cannot have opportunity to execute much. For the former part of life must be principally spent in study, and in laborious attempts to acquire the knowledge and habits, the effects of which are afterwards to be displayed. Granting therefore, what is probably true, that the understanding of a man is ripe at thirty, and that after that period he no longer improves with the same rapidity as in youth ; yet many years of unremitted exertion will be necessary to execute any great and extensive plan, or to complete any work which will benefit the world. Accordingly we find, that those authors, whose writings have contributed most to enlighten and improve mankind, have commonly been favoured with a long life. How many examples of this might be produced. Among others which occur to my recollection, I would mention only one, that of the celebrated Dr. Lardner, who at the age of forty began his *Credibility of the Gospel History*, the most learned, liberal, and comprehensive demonstration

sented, as it abounds with many comforts, and even pleasures. It may be concluded from this fact, that the aged have duties to perform ; some of which I would now lay before you in the second part of my discourse.

1. The aged should conduct themselves with suitable gravity, and not fall below the dignity of behaviour, becoming the period of life, which they have attained. It is not decent in the old to retain the levity and thoughtlessness of the young, and to indulge in vices, for which youth itself is not an excuse. It is time to be done with voluptuousness, with the loose joke, with gaming, with dissipation of every kind. These things are not only criminal, as they always were ; but they are now exceedingly shameful. They may be pardoned in youth by them, who entertain false ideas of the force of the appetites ; but in age they are pardoned by no one ; in particular, not by the young, among whom old men lose all respect, and are the objects of contempt and derision, when they still linger within the precincts of licentiousness.

2. But whilst the aged avoid their vices, they should be cautious of censuring the young. On the contrary they should be kind and indulgent, and not fall into a mistake common to old men, many of whom believe and maintain, that the former

times were better than the present. The manners and the morals of men are different at different periods. It must be granted that one age of the world is comparatively innocent ; and that another is very corrupt, such as the abominable age which preceded the Reformation of Luther, and the still worse age which preceded the revelation of the Christian religion ; but there is no reason for thinking that the present times, in this country at least, are remarkably bad. It is difficult, I am sensible, to make a just estimate ; because the knowledge of any individual must be limited ; but as far as I know, there was formerly more love of mischief, more licentiousness, and more profaneness, than there are now. We are apt to view the sins of the young, when age has removed us at a distance from them, as men, who live in the country, view the sins of large cities. They, who are unaccustomed to the bustle of men, imagine that every great town is a place of temptation and wickedness ; but they, who dwell in the capital, know that one half of the reports, which are raised against them, are not true. There is comparatively as much honour, generosity, freedom from slander, purity of behaviour, holiness, and religion, in the city, as in the country. A similar remark applies to the present times ; and the reason is the same in both cases ; for as men grow more refined, provided their refinement is not carried too far, decorum, modesty, and other virtues



of the same class prevail. I will not say that the present morals are more pure ; but they are certainly more decent, than the morals of the last century. That so many publick speakers should assert the contrary, is not to be wondered at ; because this exaggeration, like other exaggerations, enables them to be more eloquent : but whilst they inveigh against the present times, and gain applause from their admiring hearers for the fire and strength of their satirical language, let not the experienced and wise old man join in these invectives ; because he must know, that his sons are probably as correct and moral, as he was at their age. Let him maintain, what he feels every day to be true, that the sun does not shine as brightly, that the zephyrs are not as bland, that the peach is not as sweet, and that the face of the earth is not as novel and charming, as it was in his youth : but let him confess at the same time, that the change is not in surrounding objects, but in himself ; that human nature is not deteriorated ; that there is as much as there ever was of chastity and truth, of filial gratitude and reverence, of tenderness and goodness, of charity and devotion.

3. They, who are advancing in age, should take pains to prevent the love of the world from increasing in their hearts. As this sin easily besets them, they have here need of all their caution. A man,

who has lived a half century of years, must be fully convinced of the folly of extravagance. His own experience and his observation on the fate of others must prove to him, that property, when it has once been lost by sloth, neglect, or dissipation, can seldom be recovered. He sees too, that even care and prudence sometimes do not avail him ; and that he who is the most firmly established in wealth, is not secure against a reverse of fortune ; but that riches, after they have long perched on the mansion of prosperity, suddenly take wing, and leave the old man to consume the remainder of his days in poverty and dependence. It is not surprising therefore, that the fear of coming to want should sometimes enter the bosoms of them, who have heaped up silver and gold. But anxiety is as useless in this case, as it is in all others ; and for this plain reason, that it can not shield us against the apprehended evil. Prudence and foresight, when they are extended beyond proper bounds, deprive us of the very advantages, which we hope to derive from wealth, that is, of ease and independence ; and it can make no difference to a man, whether he is wretched because he is poor, or because he fears he shall be poor ; it can make no difference to him, whether he wants the comforts of life, because he cannot, or because he will not, purchase them. To the truth of these remarks most men will assent ; for there is no character so much condemned as a mere miser ; but men, without being

misers, may still be too fond of the world. An old man is too fond of it, when he is willing to spend his wealth, but chooses to spend it on himself only. He loves this world too well, when he forgets that there is another : he loves it too well, when he is not rich in good works ; when he gives nothing to the poor ; when he hardens his heart and stops his ears at the cry of the needy.

4. Whilst the old man with resolution and fortitude defends his mind against the inroads of covetousness, he should continue in the practice of industry ; and it is generally proper that he should pursue some employment even to the close of life. He should be industrious for the sake of others ; because whilst health and reason remain, it must always be in his power to benefit society : and he should be industrious for his own sake ; because if he is not, he will fall a prey to discontent. There have been so many proofs of it, that there can now be no doubt of this truth, that the man who retires completely from business, who is resolved to do nothing but enjoy himself, never attains the end, at which he aims. If it is not mixed with other ingredients, no cup is so insipid and at the same time so unhealthful, as the cup of pleasure. When the whole employment of the day is to eat, and drink, and sleep, and talk, and visit, life becomes a burden too heavy to be supported by a feeble old

man ; and he soon sinks into the arms of spleen, or falls into the jaws of death. Not satisfied with barely showing that he is alive, the old man should endeavour to make himself as useful as possible. If he moves in a large sphere, he should engage in schemes for the good of society and posterity, by promoting commerce, agriculture, manufactures, the comforts of the poor, the accommodations of his fellow citizens, the support of good government, and the interests of learning and religion. If he is confined within narrow limits, he should still do a little toward the maintenance of himself and family, and by his words and good example instruct his children and grandchildren in the principles of virtue and piety. Those old men have great reason to reproach themselves, who have passed their lives, and continue to pass them, merely in consuming the fruits of the earth, without adding any thing to its productions ; who have neither ploughed the land, nor sailed on the sea ; have not planted trees, written books, nor educated children ; have neither preached the gospel, pleaded the cause of the oppressed, nor healed the sick ; have neither framed, judged of, nor executed the laws. Such idle persons are of little use to the world ; when they die, they leave no vacancy in society ; and long before their flesh is turned to dust, the memory of them is forgotten.

The old man then should continue to work either with his body or mind, as long as strength remains :

it cannot however be expected of him, that he should make the same spirited exertions as in youth. He will become less and less active, as his limbs stiffen with age ; and he will retire still farther from the eyes of the world, as the shades of evening approach. Those employments, which require quickness of sight and hearing, melody of speech, and brilliancy of imagination, should be resigned, after age has disqualified him for filling them any longer with reputation to himself and advantage to the community. He should leave them to men, who are in the vigour of their days ; not only because they will perform the duties of them in a better manner, but because it is proper that every generation should enjoy its share of publick honours. We commend therefore the resolution of those men, who at a certain age have voluntarily divested themselves of the splendid trappings of office, and have confined their worldly business to the cultivation of their farms, or the care of their estates.

Old men should in particular be industrious in the pursuit of knowledge ; for if they are not, they will forget much of what they learned in youth. Time is incessantly employed in erasing the impressions, which have been made on the memory ; and unless they are stamped again and again, few of them will be retained. The aged should not only endeavour to preserve the knowledge, which they formerly acquired ; but they should also open their

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understandings for the reception of new ideas. By the improvements, which from year to year are made in the arts and sciences, every present generation grows wiser than the last. As there is more knowledge in the world, and easier ways of obtaining it, the old man must study, or the young will soon get beyond his sight ; the old man must study, or he will in time become unfit for conversation, for business, and for society.

5. An odious temper, against which the old man should guard himself, is obstinacy in prejudice and the want of candour. It is the nature of all bad habits, to grow more inveterate by time ; because every repetition increases their strength : bigotry therefore becomes more furious, the longer it is indulged ; but happily a mild and candid disposition can be obtained as easily as the opposite vice. With proper attention and care, age renders the mind less bigoted in opinion, and less tenacious of disputable points. He who has been accustomed to reflection, and who has frequently heard the many objections, which, with plausibility or truth, may be urged against his own sentiments, will at last be convinced, that many propositions are probable, but that few are certain. He will learn, that when he has given up what cannot be defended in his own creed, and others have surrendered what cannot be defended in theirs, he gradually comes nearer to

those Christians, whose conceptions at first were the most diverse from his own. He will perceive too, that a dogmatical spirit ill becomes any man, whose understanding is enlightened : that it may be excusable in the young, who have not had time to weigh all the difficulties, and opportunity to hear all the objections, which may be made against their opinions ; but that it is dishonourable in the aged ; because experience must have long ago evinced, that they, who have taken a different rout in the pursuit of truth, are as wise and honest as themselves. Many examples prove, that age produces this effect on an inquiring and good heart : it breaks down the sharp points, with which their minds were hedged round ; and whilst it does not divest them of their love of truth, it communicates to them a still greater love of charity. It is this catholic temper, which rendered the pious and illuminated Watts so amiable in his old age ; and it is the consciousness, that they wanted this temper in the early part of life, which has filled some men with regret, when it was drawing to a close.

6. Need I say, that the old man ought not to be vain ? for what is there of which any man can be vain ? If vanity is ever pardonable, it is in youth. For till we have tried our strength, we know not how weak we are ; till we have tried our courage, we know not how cowardly we are ; till we have

been repeatedly exposed to temptation, we know not how frail we are. A man, to whom age has given experience, feels that he is imperfect : and yet it has been said, that vanity is apt to intrude into the bosoms of the aged ; particularly of them, who have had an opportunity of seeing what others could not see, and of them, who have performed, or suppose that they have performed, extraordinary services to the publick. Perhaps the observation may not be just ; but if it is, it is dishonourable to them, to whom it applies. The old man, who apprehends that he is in danger of committing the fault, should carefully guard his heart and tongue. If he finds, that he is much inclined to speak of himself, he may be assured, that his apprehensions are not without foundation.

7. Old men are in more danger of becoming peevish and querulous, than of falling into vanity. When the bodily infirmities and diseases, to which age is exposed, attack them, nothing but the resolution and fortitude of a philosopher, and the patience and resignation of a Christian, will enable them to overcome this weakness of mind. It is best, if they have sufficient command over themselves, to confine their complaints to their own breasts, or to speak of them to their physician only ; because the recital of pains is unpleasant to others, and useless to the sufferer. They should endeav-



our to be cheerful ; for cheerfulness, which is in some measure in their power, will afford them the satisfaction of rendering the hearts of their friends, if not their own hearts, easy, and will be rewarded by them with attention and kindness.

• 8. Of what avail to the aged are human considerations, without love to God ? The world may neglect them ; but their heavenly Father will not forsake them. I would therefore above all things recommend to them the consolations of piety. Life has no dark spot, which the light of Heaven cannot illuminate ; there is no sad condition, which the blessed God cannot render joyful ; there is no exquisite pain, which the kind Physician cannot alleviate. A merciful Providence has watched over the aged through every stage of their existence. It supported them during the helpless period of infancy ; it guided them through the slippery paths of youth ; it preserved them from evil in manhood, strengthened their hands, and inspired their hearts with courage : and can they fear, that its tenderness and care will now be withdrawn ? No : as they approach nearer the throne of God, their confidence in his protection, their submission to his will, their love, their gratitude should increase : their hearts should become more alive to religion ; their affections should glow with a more intense flame of devotion.

9. Piety is the first duty of the old ; but it cannot be accounted genuine, unless it is accompanied with philanthropy. The good man, as he advances in age, grows more tender and benevolent, more mild, more indulgent, more compassionate to the wretched. His bodily powers may fail, but love still warms his heart ; his senses, his imagination, his memory may be impaired, but he still retains his charity. Such an old man becomes dearer to his friends, the longer he remains with them. Without leaving the earth, he seems already to have learned the manners of heaven. The serenity, the gentleness, the kindness, which he displays, belong to an inhabitant of a better world ; and the light of God, which is reflected from his face, proves that he has commenced his celestial career ; and that he will soon be crowned with glory, and honour, and immortality.

10. Such a good man is not afraid to think of death. As he approaches the end of life, he cannot forbear to cast his eyes frequently on the tomb ; but the prospect does not alarm him, and render him sorrowful. He is travelling to a world of unbounded bliss ; but he perceives, and is willing to acknowledge, that the country, through which he is passing, is pleasant ; that God has scattered flowers in its paths ; that it affords comforts, and even pleasures ; that many of his fellow travellers are

worthy of his love ; in a word, that the present world was framed by divine wisdom, and is continually blessed by divine goodness. He views death therefore as a change of scene ; not as a relief from evil, for he is happy here ; but as a translation from a state of transitory good to a state of exquisite and never-ending felicity.

These are the considerations, which I would suggest to the aged. But I cannot conclude the discourse, without reminding the young, that they have their duties ; and that one of the most important is, to pay homage to gray hairs. We may judge in some measure of the state of morals in any country from the manner, in which age is treated by youth. Where they, who are advanced in life, receive affection and respect, there decency is found, purity is not unknown, and the passions and appetites are under some restraint. The time was, when the old kept themselves at too awful a distance from the young ; but this reserve was productive of two evils : it rendered fathers less cheerful, and sons more licentious ; for as soon as they were out of the reach of the stern eye of authority, they gave a greater loose to their words and deeds. That state of society is the most happy, and probably the most virtuous, in which the different ages freely and frequently mix together ; and as this state of society is our own, I would hope that we

do not yet deserve the character of a very corrupt people. Approach then, my young friends, the old ; and whilst your gaiety brings a smile on their countenance, let their gravity temper your mirth. The pious and virtuous old man is worthy of your love and reverence ; he is an object, which you can contemplate with admiration and delight ; for age has the same effect on a devout and benevolent heart, which time has on a beautiful painting : it softens every colour, and mellows every tint.

4th S. in Advent.

## SERMON V.

ALMS.

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MARK xiv. 7.

YE HAVE THE POOR WITH YOU ALWAYS, AND WHENSOEVER  
YE WILL YE MAY DO THEM GOOD ; BUT ME YE HAVE NOT  
ALWAYS.

You devote, Christians, a day in the last week of the year to a sacred festival ; and you regard it as one of the most important in the religious calendar. The design is to commemorate the birth of the Saviour of mankind, to exult at the glad tidings which he has brought from heaven, and to recall to remembrance the many blessings which the gospel has conferred on the world. By celebrating the festival at this particular season, and by ornamenting your churches, and singing hymns of praise, you close the year with pious cheerfulness ; and thanksgiving and joy ascend with the voice of melody to the throne of God. An essential part of the festival is the alms, which, on this day, you are accustomed to bestow. This act, which produces useful effects, renders your devotion acceptable in

the sight of the Most High, and is an indispensable proof of gratitude and affection to your benevolent Redeemer. As it respects the objects of your beneficent care, the festival is opportunely placed at the end of the year ; for as at this season the earth is usually bound with the chains of frost, they require peculiar assistance. Such being one of the principal designs of observing the nativity of our Lord, no subject appears to me more proper for the occasion than charity ; and I trust you will not charge me with forgetting the object of the institution, when I plead before you in behalf of the poor.

That charity to the indigent is a duty of the gospel, will be allowed by all who are conversant with its pages. The Author of our religion may be styled emphatically the poor man's friend. He was well qualified to be so by his situation in life, because he was himself poor. When he was on earth, he not only bore the griefs of the sorrowful, but also the poverty of the indigent ; and in all the afflictions, which are usually laid on the wretched, he partook of a large share. Hence he became a merciful Redeemer, who is touched with the feeling of human infirmities, being tried in all respects as other men are. His family descended from the line of ancient Jewish kings ; but at the time of his birth, it had sunk into such indigence, that his mother could not obtain lodgings in the inn of Bethlehem, which was crowded with guests, who were

less poor than herself: he was therefore laid in a manger. At her purification she offered doves, the sacrifice of the indigent, not being able to present a lamb. The greatest part of his life Jesus wrought at a laborious employment; and when he entered on his publick ministry, he says of himself, that the foxes and the birds of the air had places of refuge, but that he was destitute of a home in which he could lay his head. So needy was he, that he was compelled to work a miracle for the payment of his taxes; and though we are not to suppose that he was ever reduced to such a depth of misery, as to want the necessaries of life, yet it is evident that he had learned from experience, as well as from sympathy, to feel for the indigent. Accordingly we find that he always attended particularly to them: and he declared that he came to preach the gospel to the poor. Whilst he inculcated in his precepts the duty of pitying and relieving their wants, he practised himself what he taught. His miraculous power was frequently exerted in favour of the indigent, and from a purse, which belonged to him and his disciples, small as it was, it appears that it was customary to give alms. He did still farther honour to the necessitous, by pronouncing them his representatives: in his description of the last judgment, he speaks of himself as receiving the benefit of the benevolent deeds, which are exercised towards the hungry and the naked, the sick

and the imprisoned : Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Our Saviour having ascended to heaven, the world no longer enjoys his bodily presence : but he has left the needy behind him as his substitutes, to remind us continually of him. Infants are born in dark cellars or dilapidated chambers, where their wretched mothers are exposed to the inclemencies of the air, and deprived of every comfort and accommodation : there are distressed wanderers, who have not where to lay their heads : and like Jesus on the cross, a pious son is sometimes obliged on the bed of death to commit an aged parent, for whose support he can no more provide, to the care of a faithful friend. Through the providence of God we have the poor with us always, as our Lord says in the text, and whensoever we will we can do them good, and thus testify our love to him, whilst at the same time we exercise the best virtues and the most amiable feelings of the human heart.

As we have thus the poor with us always, we are under obligations, as disciples of Christ, to pity and assist them. We should therefore, first, endeavour to acquire the will to do them good ; and, secondly, we should examine in what manner we can most effectually perform this duty.



I. The will to do good to the poor is obtained by impressing on the heart the motives of reason, nature, and the gospel. The distressed object, who cries to me for relief, is a man : He has nerves, which are alive to the touch of pain ; he has a head, which throbs ; he has a heart, which beats with anguish. As he has no food to eat, he must be hungry ; as he is naked, he must be cold ; as he is sick, he must be miserable ; as he is in prison, he must suffer the vexation which necessarily arises from the loss of liberty. He is a man, and I am no more : he is my brother, of the same nature as myself. I am exposed to similar misfortunes ; and was I as deeply afflicted as he is, my tears would flow as fast and I should utter the same sad lamentations. If our situations were exchanged, and he should pity and relieve me, with what gratitude should I behold him ? If he should say to me, Brother, it is in my power to supply thy wants, and to remove thine affliction ; take this food and satisfy thy hunger ; take this garment and cover thy shivering limbs ; I open the prison doors, and restore thee to freedom ;—with what ardent love, with what a burst of joy, should I press his hand ? Why then should I not do for him what I would wish him to do for me ? With a sympathetick imagination I ought to put myself in his place, and to feel as he feels.

He is not only a man, of the same nature as myself ; he is also my fellow Christian, the disciple of

the same Master, a member with me of the same sacred body. Jesus was born and died for his benefit as well as for mine ; he is entitled to the same spiritual privileges, and is the heir of the same glorious promises. If I love him here, and he loves me, I shall meet him again in another world, where we shall promote each other's happiness to all eternity. My felicity in that state depends on the beneficence which I exercise at present ; and I cannot with reason hope for the bliss of paradise, if I do not regard my brother as myself ; for paradise is inhabited by none, whose souls are not filled with love.

In this manner does the man and the Christian reason ; and his arguments have a direct tendency to fill his heart with good will to the poor. But the benevolent sympathies, even in the kindest heart, are greatly heightened by the actual sight of objects of distress. A picture of wo may be held up to the imagination ; but however vivid may be its colours, it makes an imperfect and transient impression : in the presence of the miserable we learn, we feel, what suffering is. The precepts of the gospel, therefore, which are founded on the most perfect knowledge of human nature, command us not only to relieve, but to visit, the wretched. I was sick and in prison, says our Saviour, and ye *came* unto me : and says the Apostle James, Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father,

is this, to *visit* the fatherless and widows in their affliction.

The children of luxury, who have never known from experience the meaning of the words, cold, hunger, and want, sometimes appear to suppose that the ministers of religion, when they deliver sermons on charity, are mere actors, who are endeavouring to be pathetick, by representing deep tragedy scenes which never existed. But if they would go to the houses of the poor, they would there find, that nothing has been exaggerated. They would there behold poverty without a veil to hide its ghastly features, poverty in a squalid abode, where the want of the means of cleanliness is the aggravation of every other evil. They would behold nothing to amuse their imaginations, but much to soften their hearts ; nothing which would afford the subject of a tender tale, but much which would make them feel like men and Christians. Let them go and see ; and they will acquire the will to do good to the poor.

II. Having fixed in the mind good will to the indigent ; we ought, secondly, to consider in what manner we can most effectually discharge the duties of charity. As in the performance of every other virtue, we should adopt a method of exercising our beneficence. We should lay down a regular plan, to which we should generally adhere, not deviating

from it, unless urged by new and unforeseen occurrences. We should not do good from the impulse of the moment ; but our benevolence should be a permanent and habitual principle. An excellent mode, which several judicious philanthropists have practised, is to appropriate a certain proportion of our income to purposes of beneficence. What this proportion should be, it is not easy to say, as neither reason nor the gospel prescribes any fixed rule : It should depend, not merely on the disposition, but on the peculiar circumstances, family connexions, prosperity, or embarrassments, of each individual. There have been individuals who have annually devoted one third part of their income to publick and private charities. I mention this to excite the emulation of the wealthy, though I do not pretend that they are obliged strictly to copy the example. Other men have given away a fourth or a fifth part of their incomes. These proportions, as well as the first, may be thought extravagant liberality ; but I would ask, is a tenth part too much for the rich ? or a twentieth, for them, who possess moderate fortunes ?

We ought also to adhere to rules, and make use of an enlightened judgment in selecting the objects of charity. We ought not to bestow our alms, merely to free ourselves from a troublesome application, or to silence the clamours of an importunate beggar : In such an act there is not much merit, and

indeed little which is better than selfishness : But we should impart our bounty to the most proper objects, and where we can effect the greatest good. If it is asked, Who are the proper objects ? I answer, they who are in distress, and who are unable to help themselves. In this comprehensive class are included several of the vitious ; for the vitious sometimes, having lost their reputation by their crimes, and ruined their health by their debaucheries, are no longer capable of an exertion, nor if they were, can they find persons willing to give them employment. But still they are the creatures of God, and he pities them ; they are our fellow creatures, and we ought to feel for them. True ; they deserve the punishment which they suffer ; but the pittance, which we give them, will leave nearly the whole of this weight on their heads ; for it will not restore their health, it will not render them respectable, it will not calm their agitated conscience.

The virtuous poor however have the first claims on our beneficence. There are industrious men, who by sickness are rendered incapable of exertion, and who have exhausted all the earnings of their health and vigour. There are women, with families of young children, and who have just been deprived of a husband, and by his death, of all the means of support. There are aged widows, infirm, helpless, and poor, whose sons have been killed in battle or lost at sea and who have now no comfort,

no protection, but the charity of strangers. These are deserving objects : they are no impostors with counterfeited stories of distress : their misery is real, and they will not abuse our bounty. Of these persons, especially of the last class, we should take on ourselves the particular charge, either as individuals, or as members of churches and charitable societies. Having thus a certainty of regular relief at stated periods, their minds are freed from anxiety and despair.

It is not enough to give alms to the indigent ; we should also devote a portion of our time and the exercise of our understandings to this benevolent work, contriving schemes which will be for the advantage of the poor, and undertaking the management of charitable funds, in such a manner as that they may be most judiciously and effectually relieved. It is here that they, who are destitute of large property, may render themselves useful ; and by their exhortations, their labours, and their discreet application of the donations of the wealthy, they may be the happy instruments of assisting many of the unfortunate. The poor are often essentially benefited by wise counsel and by recommendations to others, who have power to succour them. As these acts cost nothing but time, no benevolent person will hesitate to perform them. A man who is determined to live for others as well as for himself, will never want means and opportunities of doing

good. He can at least give the wretched kind looks and compassionate words.

Sometimes, in our bounty to the poor, we should go beyond simple necessities, and indulge them in a little innocent pleasure, particularly at seasons of festivity, like the present, when we are accustomed to fare sumptuously. In fine, we should do good to the poor, relieve their wants, lessen their pains, and render them happy, as far as our power and opportunities extend.

Such, my brethren, are your obligations as men and Christians ; and such the manner in which you ought to discharge them. To induce you to perform them, I will urge one motive only : Alms, when they are bestowed from pious and benevolent principles, will carry you to heaven. This is rendering, it may be said, the path to everlasting happiness very plain and easy. True ; but I do not render it easier and plainer than the Scriptures have made it. Many Christians have supposed, that our duty is hard to be understood and difficult to be performed. They have concluded therefore that it cannot be composed of such simple ingredients as industry and minding our business, discharging the obligations which we owe to society, practising sincerity and justice, loving our families and friends, and relieving the poor ; but that it must consist in certain inexplicable feelings, in a mysterious kind

of faith, of which a precise idea cannot be formed, and in such a love of God, as is something different from keeping his commandments. Again they are ready to think that alms is not a very essential part of religion; for though they are obliged to confess, that great stress is laid on it in the New Testament; yet they cannot allow that it is a first duty, because they find it more frequently performed than any other; and they suppose that what recommends us most to the favour of God must be actions and virtues which seldom occur. But assuredly it is doing no dishonour to the Christian religion, to say, that it has produced its intended effect. Our Saviour was sent into the world to teach men, among other precepts, the lesson of beneficence; and if many of them have actually learned it, it ought to convince us that the gospel is a practicable, as well as a wise, institution. We with pleasure observe, that excellent and salutary as alms is, it has often been practised in every age of the church, and even when the church was disfigured by the grossest corruptions of doctrine.

The practice of the primitive Christians is well known, from the New Testament and from ancient ecclesiastical history. The injunctions of the Apostles on this head were frequently obeyed; and even the heathen allowed that the beneficent example of the Christians was laudable and worthy of imitation. The Roman Catholicks, who, during many



ages, constituted the whole of the western church, and who still form so large a body in Christendom, have never fallen into the grossest and worst of all heresies, the decrying of good works; but they have in every period inculcated alms. Hence have proceeded the many excellent institutions among them for the cure of the sick, for the relief of the poor, and for hospitality to strangers. The Reformation, which divided the church, created no difference of sentiment on this subject; but the various religious denominations appear to vie with each other and with the Romish church, who shall most excel in acts of beneficence. The British nation, who stand at the head of the Protestant powers, are also the first in showing compassion to the indigent. Without insisting on their establishments for the support of the poor, which constitute a part of their standing laws, voluntary benefactions have provided for the relief or removal of every imaginable species of disease and wretchedness. Among them also first appeared the charitable and humane societies, which are too many to be numbered. These associations are all the genuine offspring of the Christian religion; and they demonstrate the excellent nature, and the practicability of the duties of the gospel.

The descendants of a Christian nation, the inhabitants of this country, inherit a portion of their good spirit. But through the peculiar goodness of

God to us, there are not such frequent opportunities of bestowing alms as in the eastern hemisphere. A subsistence can more easily be obtained ; and the indigent of consequence bear a smaller proportion to the whole number of people. In large towns, however, such as this in which we live, there will always be a great number of poor ; and here we find the soul of charity warm, vigorous, and expanded. Without presuming to draw comparisons between this city and the other cities of the United States, it must in justice to the inhabitants of this metropolis be allowed, that their extensive charities do honour to them as men and Christians. I have frequently witnessed with admiration and delight their generous benefactions, and the salutary effects which have resulted from them.

In thus praising the good deeds of my fellow citizens, my design is, to bestow on merit the reward which is its due ; and to excite, my brethren, the emulation of you who hear me ; provoking you, as the Apostle expresses it, to love and good works. An opportunity is this day afforded you of indulging the benevolent feelings of your hearts, and of lessening the sum of human misery. The helpless, the infirm, and the old, the orphan, and the widow, all of them your fellow Christians, and several of them amiable and deserving objects, solicit your aid. Your alms will clothe them, will put bread into their mouths, will kindle the cheerful fire on

their hearths, and will provide them a shelter against the rigours of winter. Let me beseech you therefore, to bestow your bounty with your accustomed liberality ; and be assured that it will be committed to faithful hands, which will impart it with discretion to the proper objects. By these donations, you will do honour to the Saviour, whose disciples you are ; you will celebrate his nativity in the most worthy manner ; your alms will rise up as a memorial before God ; they will deliver you from death, and never suffer you to descend into a place of darkness.

Christmas.

## SERMON VI.

THE YEAR AND ITS DIVISIONS.

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GEN. i. 14.

AND GOD SAID, LET THERE BE LIGHTS IN THE FIRMAMENT OF HEAVEN, TO DIVIDE THE DAY FROM THE NIGHT; AND LET THEM BE FOR SIGNS, AND FOR SEASONS, AND FOR DAYS, AND YEARS.

THE beginning of a new year suggests to the mind many reflections. Among others it calls the attention to that arrangement of the earth and the heavenly bodies, which causes the seasons, the year itself, and the several parts into which it is divided. A consideration of this subject will lead us to a justification of the ways of God.

The heavenly bodies, beside affording light and heat to the earth, fertility to the ground, health to the atmosphere, and rendering the world a convenient and pleasant habitation to men and other animals, serve also to produce the seasons, and several of the divisions, which are made in the year. By the diurnal revolution of the earth on its axis is effected the natural distinction of day and night, and of evening, midnight, morning, and noon; but

the divisions of the day into hours, minutes, and seconds, is the work of man, the convenience of which he soon learned, and the utility of which has been confirmed by long experience. The distinction of weeks is in like manner not pointed out by any motion of the luminaries of heaven, but results from the appointment, not of man, but of God, who, according to the Mosaick history, enacted it by a positive law, when he disposed the earth in the order, in which it now appears. The distinction of months was, as the name implies, suggested by the revolution of the moon in its orbit; whilst that of the year is nothing else than a complete revolution of the earth, when, after a certain period it returns to the point of its orbit, from which it began its course. The seasons are produced by the inclination of the axis of the earth to the plane of its orbit; and their unequal length, that is, that summer is somewhat longer than winter, proceeds from this cause, that the orbit of the earth is not a circle, but an ellipsis, in consequence of which it moves with greater rapidity during the cold, than during the hot season of the year.

A man, who looks at nature with an attentive eye, will observe in it many correspondences. Some of these ~~correspondences~~ are of necessity; and others appear to be the effect of positive institution. Of the former are all geometrical relations, and the

harmony of numbers ; as, to give only one example, the harmony which exists between numbers in arithmetical and geometrical progression, from which is derived the whole doctrine of logarithms. Every person present will recollect many instances of correspondence, which seem to be of positive institution, in the art or science with which he is best acquainted. A man, who has frequently contemplated with delight these correspondences, may perhaps be ready to expect them where he will look for them in vain ; or at least he may wish that they were still more numerous. In particular, he would be not a little pleased, if an exact harmony was to be found between the motions of the earth and the moon, and the apparent diurnal and annual revolutions of the sun. If he was to give a theoretical account of what he would choose the year and its divisions to be, he would say,—The year consists of an even number of months, and of days, without any fractions. The motions of the moon and earth are so exactly accommodated to each other, that the last day of the last month is the last day of the year. Eight is a number, which can be evenly divided forever : there are therefore eight months in the year. The moon revolves round the earth, from change to change, precisely in sixty-four days ; which are conveniently distributed into eight weeks : so that the year consists of eight months, sixty-four weeks, and five hundred and twelve days. For the sake

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of producing the variety of the seasons, the axis of the earth is inclined to the plane of its orbit ; but this orbit is a circle ; and consequently the seasons are of equal lengths. Such an arrangement prevents the painful labours of the astronomer ; chronology is freed from all its embarrassments ; golden numbers and other hard words, which would puzzle the heads of the unlearned, are unknown ; every man, without any mathematical skill, can make his own almanack ; the length of the year is the same in all ages and countries ; and there can be no necessity of ever reforming the calendar.

A theory of this sort is apt to enter the mind of a man, who thinks, but who does not think profoundly. With Alphonzo, king of Castile, who lived at a period when the science of astronomy was imperfectly understood, he may be ready to say, The universe is strangely made ; if I had been consulted, I could have arranged the heavenly bodies in a more exact order.

That the actual state of things differs from this theory ; that there is no exact correspondence between the motion of the earth and the moon, no harmony between the day and the year, is well known. The year does not comprise a precise number of days, or equal parts of a day ; it cannot be measured by any number of moons ; nor by any number of weeks, hours, minutes, or even seconds. In consequence of this want of harmony,

astronomy is one of the most difficult of all sciences, and chronology is full of perplexities.

Many ages elapsed, before even the length of the year was ascertained. They who made it consist of twelve moons, found that the commencement of the year was continually moving backward, from winter to autumn, and from summer to spring. He therefore, who first conjectured that it contained three hundred and sixty days, was supposed to possess great sagacity ; and still wiser was he thought, who approached nearer, by adding five days more. An illustrious action of a renowned conqueror was the invention of the leap-year. But neither was his year exact ; for after the lapse of a number of centuries, the calendar was perceived to have fallen again into confusion ; so that it became necessary to reform it once more ; which was accordingly done by Pope Gregory XIII. The Gregorian year is that which is now in use ; but even this measurement, though it approaches very near to the truth, is not exact ; for after many thousand years have passed away, should the world exist so long, another reformation of the calendar will be required. In the mean while, the period of a month, though it was first suggested by, is somewhat longer than the revolution of the moon ; and it cannot be divided into an equal number of weeks. The months themselves are not of the same length ; and the commencement of the year is placed arbitrarily,



and not on the days, when the sun crosses the equinoctial line, nor on the days, when it is either at its greatest or least distance from the earth.

Thus irregular is the year. Happily however, in the present state of knowledge, no evils whatever result from this irregularity. We have calendars of time as exact, as if astronomy was the easiest of sciences ; and though every man cannot calculate his own almanack, yet, when it is made for him by the learned, it can be rendered intelligible to a simple capacity. The Being, who gives motion to the earth and the heavenly bodies, could undoubtedly have arranged them in a different order, so as that there should have been more points of harmony and co-incidence between them ; but in the arrangement, which exists, his power and wisdom are sufficiently displayed. If the duration of the year could be measured by a precise number of days and moons, men would be ready to overlook the Author of nature, and would no more perceive his hand, than they now perceive it in the harmony of numbers, which is believed to be independent of his will, and to be the result of the necessary relation of things : but when they learn, that to a certain number of days must be added hours, minutes, seconds, and fractions of seconds, to complete the year, and that this measure continues the same, without the smallest variation, from age to age ; they are obliged to confess

that it must proceed from the positive institution of a divine agent, and that he holds a balance, which is so exquisitely exact, as to weigh the most ponderous masses of matter, not only to tons, but to scruples and grains. But whilst, on the one hand, the heavenly luminaries, amidst their seeming irregularity, manifest his power and wisdom ; they are not, on the other hand, destitute of harmonies, in which the same divine attributes are discerned : as, to mention no other, the perfect correspondence which exists, without the variation of the thousandth part of a second, between the motion of the moon on its axis, and its monthly revolution in its orbit ; in consequence of which it always presents the same face to the earth.

The relations which the sun, moon, and earth bear to each other display the power and wisdom of God ; and their apparent want of correspondence is not without its uses to man. Man is a creature, who is so constituted by his Maker, that his growth and health, his happiness, his dignity, and perfection are the results of corporeal and mental labour. Almost all the gifts of heaven are presented to him, as it were, in a rude state, to be improved by his skill and industry ; and in proportion as these gifts are more precious, or more ennobling to his nature, they call for greater exertions of the body or mind. This observation will be found to be just,

if it is applied to agriculture, to navigation, or to any of the useful arts ; to jurisprudence, to the philosophy of the mind, or to any of the elevated sciences. The Father of the human race has not only bestowed on man the materials of knowledge, but he has also conferred on him invention and genius, by which he has power to combine them together in such order, as to promote his own felicity, and to produce the most beautiful results ; and there is no science, however high, which he does not seem capable of attaining, and of enlarging and improving without limits.

Previous to a knowledge of the actual fact, it was to be expected therefore, that a science so sublime as astronomy, which expands the soul with the conception of infinity, should not be exempt from a law to which others are subject, and should not be abandoned to the discoveries of the simple and illiterate, to be understood by them without any mental exertion. The Author of nature has not in this instance deviated from his usual course ; but that he might dignify the minds of the noblest of his children, and excite the inventions of their industry and genius, he has removed the correspondences which exist between many other parts of his works. He has formed the heavens according to an exquisite plan ; but to the undiscerning eye they appear a maze which perplexes the understanding. At length however, after many laborious efforts of

the wise, and after he has sent down from his throne such men as Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton, to enlighten the world, the whole is comprehended ; every part of the universe is found to stand in the situation in which it ought to be placed ; and the devout heart is filled with admiration and gratitude, in contemplating the immense power, wisdom, and goodness of God. Thus we see him every where, at home and abroad, on the earth and in the sky ; and it is the end of all the sciences, and of astronomy in particular, to introduce us into his presence. Let us ever therefore love, and praise, and adore that glorious Being, who by his excellent wisdom made the heavens ; who hath made great lights, the sun to rule by day, and the moon and the stars to govern the night ; for his mercy endureth forever.

New Year.

## SERMON VII.

WHAT ADVANTAGE HAVE CHRISTIANS ABOVE THE GENTILES  
OF ANCIENT TIMES.

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ISAIAH lx. 1, 2, 3.

ARISE, SHINE; FOR THY LIGHT IS COME, AND THE GLORY  
OF THE LORD IS RISEN UPON THEE. FOR BEHOLD, THE  
DARKNESS SHALL COVER THE EARTH, AND GROSS DARK-  
NESS THE PEOPLE: BUT THE LORD SHALL ARISE UPON  
THEE, AND HIS GLORY SHALL BE SEEN UPON THEE. AND  
THE GENTILES SHALL COME TO THY LIGHT, AND KINGS  
TO THE BRIGHTNESS OF THY RISING.

IN the text, Isaiah, with his usual sublimity, fore-  
tells the manifestation of Christ to the gentiles.  
Not only he, but other prophets predict it; and it  
is a theme, on which the writers of the New Tes-  
tament, and in particular St. Paul, dwell with great  
delight. We have so long been a chosen genera-  
tion, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar  
people, that we now consider this privilege as our  
birthright, and are too often unmindful of the ex-  
tent of the blessing. It is necessary therefore to  
direct our attention to it, that our hearts may be  
impressed with gratitude to God, and that we may

show forth the praises of him, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Many parts of the world now enjoy the bright beams of divine revelation ; but there was a time, when it was confined to one favoured spot, and when darkness covered the rest of the earth, and gross darkness the people. If we had not been graciously taken out of this state, instead of adoring with sacrifices of love the benevolent Father of the universe, we should be the terrified worshippers of Woden, Thor, and Friga, and the other barbarous gods of our Saxon ancestors. But let us arise and shine ; for the light of the gospel is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon us : and we gentiles are come to the light of the sun of righteousness, and our kings to the brightness of his rising.

As God is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works, the dispensation, by which one nation is favoured with the knowledge of the truth, and all others are left in ignorance and error, is somewhat mysterious. The best solution of this difficulty is derived from the consideration of what kind of being man is ; and this is the solution, which the Scriptures give. Man is a free agent : he has power to go right ; and he has power to go wrong. There can be no doubt, that at the beginning the idolatry of the nations was voluntary ; because God

in no age of the world has left himself without witness. So St. Paul teaches us. That which may be known of God, says he, is manifest in them, for God hath shown it unto them. For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they [idolaters] are without excuse. These observations of the Apostle are reasonable; and they ought to stop the mouth of the objector.

Idolatry and all other sins originate from the wills of men; but they do not take place without the knowledge of the Supreme Being. He has wise designs in permitting them to exist; and he mercifully educes good from the greatest evil. Pious and thoughtful men have pointed out many reasons, which rendered it expedient that one nation should be separated for a time from the rest of the world, and chosen as the depository of the oracles of God. Of these reasons that which stands preeminent is, that preparations were thus made for the coming of the Messiah, and satisfactory evidence afforded of the divinity of his mission.

Because a peculiar people was elected to preserve the knowledge of the unity of God, it does not thence follow, that all other nations were delivered over to the influence of Satan, or to the government of malignant demons: for this supposition cannot be true. The Supreme Being, though not

exactly in the same sense, was the God of the Babylonians and Egyptians, of the Greeks and Romans, as well as of the Jews. He rewarded them for their virtues, or punished them for their vices, by prosperity or by adversity, in the same manner as he rewarded or punished the people, over whom he more visibly reigned. What has perplexed the understandings of some Christians, is a question, which is often asked, and which they think themselves unable to answer: Whether there is cause to believe that any of the heathen, who lived before the coming of Christ, and who were unacquainted with divine revelation, can be saved? To this question there are many Christians, in the present age, who do not hesitate a moment what answer to give. They say, that in every nation good men, who make the best use of the knowledge which they possess, are, whatever their external advantages may be, approved by Heaven, and will be rewarded in the other world. Whilst it is a doctrine of the Bible, that God hath appointed us to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, it teaches that the way, by which men enter into this everlasting life, is not by believing in a mediator, of whom they never heard, and of whom it was impossible that they should hear, but by keeping the commandments. When every part of this divine book declares that God is merciful, that he forgives even the sins of men, and cannot therefore be sup-



posed to punish their ignorance, we dare not to consign to everlasting flames the virtuous heathen of ancient times, who sincerely and diligently framed their lives according to the light of nature and the religions which they had received and which they professed.

The heathen, who, with the exception of a few enlightened men, were deprived of the knowledge of the true God, were incapable of attaining the perfection of virtue : but that they were not entirely destitute of correct notions of morality is manifest from their writings, which are still extant ; and in which many examples of fortitude, of contempt of death, of patriotism, of chastity, of hospitality, of justice, sincerity, and the love of truth, of clemency in kings and loyalty in subjects, are exhibited to our view. The works of the ancient Greek philosophers, debased, it is confessed, with absurd theories, contain valuable precepts, from the perusal of which even Christians might derive advantage. Among the productions of the Romans, the Offices of Cicero, though it must be allowed to be inferiour to the treatises of the moderns, who have enjoyed the light of the gospel, is yet an excellent system of ethicks. I do not insist on the works of Epictetus, a Greek, and Seneca, a Latin writer, whose ideas of morals were still more complete ; because both of them lived after the birth of Jesus ; and though neither of

them mentions his name, yet possibly they might have been indirectly indebted for their more correct sentiments to the light, which the Christian religion had diffused over the world. But however this may be, it is a fact, which cannot be disputed, that the ancients in some measure comprehended the subject of morals, and faithfully performed many acts of virtue.

That they must of necessity have done so, is evident : because it is not possible to conceive, how a family, city, republick, or any society, whether large or small, can subsist without the knowledge and practice of morality. In a family there must be a husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters ; from which relations necessarily arise the duties of filial obedience, conjugal fidelity, and parental and fraternal love. That the heathen sometimes neglected these duties, must be confessed ; but unless they had been frequently discharged, families would soon have fallen to pieces, and the human race would have disappeared from the face of the earth. In like manner in a city, men in their intercourse with each other must have generally observed the rules of truth and honesty ; falsehood and fraud must in ancient times, as they are now, have been rare and monstrous ; otherwise confidence being destroyed, all mutual connexion would have ceased. In a republick also, the citizens in general must have been subject to the laws,

and the magistrates in general must have administered them with impartiality and justice ; otherwise there would have been an end of all government, and there could have been no tie to bind the several parts of it together. If therefore many of the heathen performed these duties, what right have we to say that they were not good men, and that they were not blessed by God in this world, and that they will not be rewarded in the other.

Whilst, however, this truth, that many of the heathen were virtuous, is established by indisputable facts, and just deductions from the known qualities of human nature, and from the relations which necessarily exist among men,—it must at the same time be admitted, that the summit of moral perfection among them was far below that, to which the Christian aspires. Their absurd idolatries debased all their virtues. Many of them possessed the good qualities, which I have ascribed to them ; but of the moral graces, which are peculiar to the Christian, and which are his most splendid ornaments, they had an imperfect conception. They were in particular deficient in that comprehensive virtue, which in the New Testament is styled charity or love. We find few traces among them of disinterestedness, of sympathy, of compassion.

Hence it is that so few of the writings of the ancients are interesting, or appear pathetick to a

modern reader, whose moral taste has been refined, and whose heart has been softened, by the instructions of the gospel. There are in their works scenes of distress, but not many of tenderness. Their fictitious tales, which were undoubtedly composed with the design of impressing the hearts of the most dignified part of mankind, and of exciting noble and virtuous sentiments, enable us more accurately than any other works to ascertain the standard of morals, as it was fixed among them. Of these fictitious tales the epick poems of Homer and Virgil, the three which are the most renowned, have fortunately been handed down to posterity. These romances, for the melody of their verse, and the art and genius which they display, have in all ages been the admiration and delight of men of taste : but if we look for exalted virtue in them, we shall be disappointed in our expectation. The poets, who invented them, were at liberty to feign what they pleased ; and they intended to make their heroes as perfect, as was consistent with probability : but whilst they were magnanimous, how sadly deficient were they in the virtues, which interest the heart !

In the *Iliad*, the only character, who excites much esteem, or for whom we feel much concern, is Hector. His parting interview with Andromache is natural and affecting. We pity his fate, and applaud his courage ; and we give all due praise to

the virtue, which he displayed, the love of his child and of the wife of his bosom. There is in the Iliad one scene, which was capable of being wrought up to a high pitch of tenderness and generosity ; and we cannot forbear regretting that on this occasion Homer was not inspired with a portion of the godlike spirit, which animates the breast of a Christian. When we see Priam go by night to the tent of Achilles, to beg the slaughtered body of his son ; when we behold the stern eye of the hero melting into tears at the view of the afflicted father, we expect that something noble will ensue : but the whole scene ends in disappointment, and leaves a chill in the affections ; for Achilles at last, though he grants his request, appears to be influenced, more by the costly presents which Priam brought, than by any compassion that he feels, or the eloquent intreaties of the wretched old man.\*

In the Odyssey, which is a still more entertaining romance than the Iliad, the fidelity of Eumæus, the filial piety of Telemachus, and the chastity of Penelope merit our approbation ; but Ulysses, the hero of the poem, is a plausible, subtle, and cruel man. A subtle and cruel man is a character, whom every Christian must abhor ; and we cannot for a moment rejoice in his success.

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\* Marmontel, after censuring with just severity the conduct of Achilles on this occasion, adds, " Heroism was never less known than in the age which has been called heroick."

The cold character of Æneas, in Virgil's elegant romance, is not, even by the majesty of verse, made interesting to the heart. His treacherous dereliction of Dido, and his unlawful attempt to deprive Turnus, not only of his kingdom, but of his betrothed wife, destroy all sympathy with a hero, who is meant to be described as a model of piety and magnanimity.

It would have been in the power of these renowned poets to have made their romances much more interesting and pathetick, if they had been acquainted with the system of morals which is contained in the gospel. It was not their fault, that they had not more exalted ideas of virtue ; but it was the misfortune of the age in which they lived, and of the religion which they professed.

The fictitious tales of the moderns are much more affecting to the heart ; and they are indebted for the strong interest, which they excite, principally to the high standard of morals, which the Christian religion has raised. Tenderness and benevolence are displayed in their most popular scenes. The heroes are generous and disinterested ; and the heroines, compassionate and charitable. These productions are often frivolous, and sometimes mischievous ; they should therefore be selected with caution : but with all their faults, as a class of books, they establish one important fact, that the moral taste of men in the present age is much more

correct, than it was in ancient times ; for which no adequate cause except this can be assigned, that they are no longer gentiles, but Christians. For as the design of the authors of these books is to interest their readers, they are obliged to conform their works to prevailing opinions and feelings ; and they cannot effect this purpose by any other means, than by endowing their principal characters with the sublime virtues, which are enjoined in the New Testament. Thus do they add one more proof to the many others which exist, that Christianity is the most perfect, the most improving, of all religions.

If therefore the question is asked, What has the gospel done ? the answer is, that it has doomed no virtuous gentile to the abyss of everlasting destruction ; for the Son of man is come, not to destroy men's lives, but to save them : it has depressed no good man, who without any fault of his own is deprived of its light ; but it has exalted all, by whom it is received and obeyed. It has created a new order of beings with enlarged capacities ; it has lifted their eyes to heaven, and enkindled in their souls the flame of divine love ; it has raised the character of human nature higher, than it ever was before ; it has refined and ennobled men, and made them kings and priests unto God.

But as man still retains his free agency, it is in the power of Christians to abuse these inestimable privileges. I would therefore exhort you, disciples of Jesus, to be mindful of your high and holy calling. Remember that you are placed on an elevated part of the mountain of God ; and that if your feet slip, your fall will be deplorable. Look not behind you, but upward, before you. With heroick ardour and generous zeal press forward, and strive to attain the summit ; that thence you may ascend to the regions of everlasting bliss, which are prepared for the righteous.

Epiphany.



## SERMON VIII.

### THE MARRIAGE IN CANA.

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JOHN ii. 1, 2.

**THERE WAS A MARRIAGE IN CANA OF GALILEE; AND THE MOTHER OF JESUS WAS THERE; AND BOTH JESUS WAS CALLED, AND HIS DISCIPLES, TO THE MARRIAGE.**

AMONG the variety of human characters, there are two, which form a striking contrast with each other. In the first gaiety of heart is predominant. The impressions which are made on them are pleasurable, but do not reach beneath the surface. They pursue no fixed plan, and are not deeply interested in any thing which takes place. Their ear is tuned to the sharp key in musick; and their eye is formed to delight in brilliant and changing objects. Frequently innocent, and sometimes positively good, they can never be styled great; and they deserve not to be considered in a more respectable light than as children of a larger growth.

In the other characters seriousness is the prevailing trait. The impressions, which are made on these men, are deep and lasting. Not a nerve is

touched, but it vibrates through their whole frame. They are charmed with the sublime objects of nature, with solemn and melancholy sounds. They delight in retiring into a desert or to the summit of a high mountain to pray ; and they frequently almost lose sight of the material world, whilst their minds are absorbed in God. Their designs are in a high degree important ; and their manners and conduct are uniformly grave and dignified.

Of this latter cast of character was Jesus Christ. The majesty of seriousness reigned in his mind. He sometimes wept ; but no sentiment of levity, no instance of gaiety, no sprightly sally, is recorded by the writers of his life. The important business, which his Father assigned him, precluded all light thoughts. A consciousness that he was acting under the eye of God seems constantly to have filled his mind ; and with this sacred persuasion, overlooking every trifling object, the awe of devotion, the sublimity of great designs occupied his heart.

Besides, the idea of the painful death which he was ordained to suffer, and which he clearly foresaw, must often have oppressed his soul with the deepest melancholy. How could a man be cheerful, who knew that he was soon to expire on a cross ; and who was compelled by his overwhelming fears to utter such language as this : Father, let this cup pass from me ; Father, save me from this hour ?

The character of Jesus was grave and serious, melancholy and sublime; but it was not sullen and rigid. He did not forbid others to be cheerful. It has been common in the founders of false religions to affect a remarkable degree of austerity; but the author of our religion can on no occasion be accused of this affectation. He joined in innocent festivals; and readily accepted the invitations, which he received, to partake of entertainments. Of this several instances are given by the evangelists; and they are written for our instruction, that we may learn from them, that true religion does not consist in austerity of manners, penances, and mortification, but in purity of heart, sanctity of morals, and unaffected devotion.

Omitting the other instances, which are recorded in the Gospels, I would request your attention to the narrative, which has furnished me with the subject of my discourse. It exhibits a feature of our Saviour's character; and like every other part of his perfect example, it indirectly conveys several important precepts.

There was in Cana a marriage feast, to which Jesus, his mother, and disciples were invited. Though he knew that on such occasions, the hearts of the guests are commonly very cheerful, yet he did not refuse the invitation; and he appears to have made no attempt to interrupt the innocent

mirth of the company. The wine, which was provided for the entertainment, being exhausted, the mother of Jesus informed him of the circumstance ; and doubting not that he would be graciously pleased to afford his assistance, she called the servants to her, and bade them to do whatever he should order. Jesus commanded them to fill six large water-pots with water : which being done, it was immediately changed into the purest wine.

Thus did the great Messiah not only sanction by his presence the cheerfulness of an innocent feast, but even exert his miraculous power to augment the joy of the guests. Thus did he demonstrate that he is no enemy to the happiness of man ; and that his religion is not designed to abridge our social pleasures, or to deprive us of a single source of rational enjoyment.

This miracle was exhibited before he entered on his publick ministry ; and he manifested the same indulgent spirit, after his time was come, and he openly showed himself as the Messiah. The solemn and hypocritical Pharisees, who disfigured their faces, for a pretence made long prayers, and appeared outwardly religious, objected against him a conduct, which was such a severe censure on their own. They charged him with being a glutton and drunkard, and a friend of publicans and sinners ; but the purity of his character defeated these insinuations. As they dealt only in general invective

portant feature in his character. It shows that he was the great teacher sent from God, and that he employed every opportunity to communicate his heavenly lessons, and to confirm his divine mission. The miracle which he wrought on this occasion, as the Evangelist says, manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him. It demonstrated that he was the Messiah foretold by the prophets; that God was with him and assisted him, and that he had received a commission, which authorized him to become the instructor of the world: and the faith of his disciples was confirmed by the supernatural argument.

Thus in the midst of a joyful company, when mirth and wine were flowing round, was the soul of the great Messiah occupied with serious objects. He did not lose sight a moment, of the important business, which his Father had committed to him; but all his actions directly tended to advance the glory of God, to confirm his divine religion, and to promote the salvation of men.

The presence of Jesus at the marriage in Cana conveys important lessons to several different classes of persons. It teaches the instructors of religion to avoid an affected gravity and hypocritical austerity of manners. It convinces them, that, like their great Master, they may lawfully join in social parties and innocent festivals. But it solemnly warns

them not to give way to ungodly mirth, not to violate the sanctity of the Christian character, and to lose no proper opportunity which presents itself of communicating moral and religious instruction to their associates.

The history imparts a similar lesson to parents, who are charged by God with the education of their children. They should be cheerful and indulgent; they should partake of the innocent sports of their offspring; and smile on all their lawful pleasures. But they should not for a moment forget, that the tender mind stands in perpetual need of cultivation; that if it is not constantly attended to, either the soil will be barren, or weeds will spring up, and choke every useful plant. They therefore should be continually inculcating a regard to truth, diligence in lawful pursuits, obedience to their parents, love to their brothers, and piety to God; and these lessons should be delivered, not in long and formal lectures, which are always tedious to the young; but in short hints, agreeable allusions to the visible objects of nature, entertaining narratives, and above all by their own correct example.

Finally, to men in general this history affords useful information. It teaches you all, my brethren, to yield your faith, obedience, and homage to the Christian religion, the author of which was so unaffected and wise a character, so indulgent to the innocent pleasures of society, and so exempt from

austerity of manners. It proves to you, that the religion, which was introduced with such a splendid miracle, must be from God. It instructs you to love your Saviour with the same ardent love, with which he loved his friends ; and to let gratitude flow from your swelling hearts, in a stream as rich, as generous, as delicious, as the wine which flowed at the marriage of Cana.

2d S. after Epiph.

## SERMON IX.

GOD PARDONS PENITENT SINNERS.

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ISALAH lv. 7.

LET THE WICKED FORSAKE HIS WAY, AND THE UNWRIGHT-  
EOUS MAN HIS THOUGHTS ; AND LET HIM RETURN UNTO  
THE LORD, AND HE WILL HAVE MERCY UPON HIM, AND  
TO OUR GOD, FOR HE WILL ABUNDANTLY PARDON.

SUCH passages of the sacred oracles as the words, which I have now read, are most attended to by the humble Christian, whose anxious inquiry is, how he shall obtain the favour of the Supreme Being. In the Scriptures there are difficulties, which an unenlightened believer cannot easily solve : there are texts, which are dark, and hard to be understood. Critical skill in the dead languages, a knowledge of ancient customs, and, in a word, comprehensive learning, are necessary for their explanation. But happily these passages have little connexion with practice. A Christian can find his way to heaven, although he cannot determine what they mean ; for he has, for the direction of his steps, such lights as the text, in which his duty is plainly pointed out.



In the prophecy of Isaiah there are many obscurities. It cannot always be decided, whether the Prophet is speaking of the state of the Jews, or of the Christian church under the reign of the Messiah : but this text is perfectly clear ; and whether addressed to the Jews only, or to other nations, it is applicable to all men. Every offender is encouraged by it to repent of his sins, and humbly to seek the mercy of God.

The doctrine of the text is this, that if a wicked man will repent of his sins, alter his course of life, and obey the commandments of God, he shall obtain forgiveness from his Maker. This is one of the most important and consoling truths made known by divine revelation. I mean not at present to inquire, whether it could have been discovered by the light of nature : on this point there are different opinions : we need not perplex ourselves with them : it is sufficient for us that the Bible declares that a repentant sinner has every thing to hope from the mercy of God.

Though we decline considering this particular question, it may perhaps be necessary to observe, that it is not inconsistent with the justice of God to forgive sinners on their repentance. A number of Christians have supposed, that divine justice cannot pardon a sinner, unless, in addition to his reformation, full satisfaction is also made, in another way, for all his past offences. But does not this suppo-

sition deprive the Supreme Being of the attribute of mercy? Where full satisfaction is made, pardon is not an act of mercy, but of equity. It is impossible that a man should atone for his past transgressions in any other way, than by changing his conduct. In this case, ceasing to be what he formerly was, punishment becomes unnecessary. Sufficient honour is done to the perfection of the divine law by the sinner, who by his conversion declares, that it is a good law and ought to be obeyed. Mercy therefore may reasonably be extended toward him; nor can justice forbid that it should be.

What is the end of the Deity in the government of the world? Is it not to make men happy by making them virtuous? When therefore they become so, when they cease to be vitious, what good purpose can it answer to render them miserable? Why should any metaphysical ideas of the justice of God lead us to suppose, that they who are now holy, who abhor their former characters, and who sincerely resolve never to repeat their crimes, are unworthy of the divine mercy, and ought to be punished with unutterable torments?

We cannot reasonably suppose it. We ought then to receive the text in its simple and obvious meaning. We ought to believe that God will forgive the sinner on his repentance, without any other condition. This, as I have suggested, is the doctrine of the Scriptures. One design of our Sa-

viour's mission into the world was to make this truth known ; as the Prophet teaches us in this chapter : I have given him, says God, for a witness to the people—and his instruction is—Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found ; call upon him, while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and return unto the Lord ; and he will have mercy on him.

This doctrine of the Scriptures, that God forgives the repentant sinner, which is so positively asserted in the text, leads us to make several interesting reflections.

1. In the first place, it exhibits the character of our heavenly Father in the most amiable light, and induces us to love him above all objects. The foundation of true piety is just and honourable ideas of the benevolence of God. When we think of him only as a Being, who is arrayed with terrour and armed with vengeance, we fear, but we do not love him. It is to his goodness that we give our affection ; or, to express myself in the language of St. John, we love him, because he first loved us. His unbounded benevolence is our consolation and support. Upon his benevolence we depend with security ; and we trust we are in the hands of a God, who continually delights to do us good. His mercy is the most amiable modification of his benevolence. His benevolence leads him to love his creatures in general ; but his mercy in-

duces him to love them, who have offended him, who are his enemies, who are unworthy of his love. In what strong terms is this represented in the text ! God will have mercy upon the sinner : he will *abundantly* pardon him. There are many other affecting passages of the same kind in the sacred volume. The Lord, says Moses, is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression. To the same purpose the Psalmist speaks : The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide ; neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins ; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. Can we forbear to love a Being, who is so compassionate ? Can we forbear to comply with the easy terms, which are necessary to obtain his favour ?

2. The mercy of God ought to lead us to repentance. If, when we had sinned, our doom was irrevocably fixed, and we had no hope of obtaining pardon, we should have nothing to do but to give ourselves up to despair, and not make any useless efforts to retrieve our character. But the Bible declares, that there is room for hope, that there are still many motives for exertion. It teaches us that it is never too late to attempt a reformation. God will forgive, not only one offence, but innumerable transgressions. Though we have rendered our souls

as scarlet with sin ; yet God will make them, if we are humble and contrite, whiter than the pure wool. For his thoughts are not our thoughts ; neither are his ways our ways. *We* cannot easily forgive, when we have been repeatedly injured ; but the compassion of God is abundant in pardon ; and though we grievously offend him, yet if we return and repent, he will still forgive us.

Let a knowledge of this important truth induce you, who are bewildered in the mazes of sin, and who are wandering in the paths of destruction, to return, like the penitent prodigal, to the house of your Father and Friend. The ways of vice are dark, intricate, and dismal. No light, no peace, no comfort can be found in them. The pleasures which it promised are soon experienced to be illusions. Your heart is torn with a thousand conflicting passions. Whithersoever you turn, the sharp points of conscience wound your soul. Would you remain in this painful situation, if you believed it possible to escape ? It is possible : divine revelation assures you that it is. The text authorizes me to declare, that there is a passage, through which you can flee : Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.


Perhaps you are conscious of having been guilty of so many offences, that you think it impossible that

you should obtain favour. You fear that you have outlived your day of grace, and that you have now no hope of pardon. But the mercy of God is not limited to any particular number of offences. It is a broad and deep ocean, of sufficient capacity to receive them all. Look into the sacred history, and you will find that atrocious sinners have been forgiven ; the idolatrous Manasseh ; the persecuting Paul ; Peter, who profanely and ungratefully denied his Master ; and even David, who was guilty of the crimes of adultery and murder. Some of these persons became afterward by their eminent virtues the ornaments of human nature. You perceive by these examples, that it is possible to reform, and to efface your sins, however black they may be.

The apprehension, that the mercy of God is limited, is not then a reasonable motive ; and it ought to have no influence upon you : there are other causes which obstruct your conversion. You experience that the way of the transgressor is hard ; but you are afraid that the way of the righteous man is still more difficult. It is laborious to begin on a new course, and to alter your former habits of life. You have to study the elements of virtue, to learn a new language, the language of heaven, and to unlearn the language of sin, which you now speak. This is a double labour ; and you think that it cannot be overcome. But let me beseech you to make

the effort. You will find the task easier the farther you proceed. God, who is your Master in this great science, will assist you with every necessary instruction ; good men will applaud your industry, and animate you to persevere ; and unless you acquire this knowledge, you know that you cannot be happy ; nay you are certain that you must inevitably be miserable.

Another cause which may prevent your returning to God is the fear of what the world will say, should you attempt to reform. But what is this world, of which you are so much afraid ? Is it composed of the wise and the good ; of men whose advice you would ask or follow in any transaction which affected your temporal interest ? Does it consist of persons for whom you have the least esteem ? No : but it is made up of the idle, the impertinent, and the profligate ; men whose understandings are commonly as contemptible, as their morals are depraved. The greatest number of sinners, though they neglect to imitate, will approve your conduct. For virtue is so lovely, that it forces applause even from them, who violate its duties. But if you do not reform, the whole world, including the despicable fragment of it which I have mentioned, will condemn you. The wicked will openly slander you, and even represent your crimes worse than they are ; and the good, if they do not openly blame you, will at least censure you in their hearts.



Whence proceed the severe observations on abandoned characters which you sometimes hear? You do not find that the vicious are disposed to treat the faults of their erring brothers with compassion, and much less, with commendation. I repeat it : you have no reason to be afraid of the world, when you are conscious that you are doing what is right ; for though the world, through misinformation and prejudice, may condemn for a time what it ought not to condemn, yet in general its opinion becomes correct at last.

The most powerful cause, which prevents your reformation, is pride. You are ashamed to acknowledge that you are in a false way ; and you are too obstinate to give up a mode of life, which you have once pursued. It is pride, and not a fear that God wants mercy, which detains so many persons in the way of sin. They are too haughty to bend their knees to the Father of mercies ; they disdain to ask forgiveness even at his hands. There are persons who confidently pronounce, that they never did any thing which is wrong. They acknowledge that human nature is frail ; but they insinuate that they are exempt from fault. In all altercations with their fellow men, in all clashing of interest, they pertinaciously maintain, contrary to justice, and sometimes to the convictions of their own consciences, that they have done nothing, which they ought not to repeat in like circumstances.



as scarlet with sin ; yet God will make them, if we are humble and contrite, whiter than the pure wool. For his thoughts are not our thoughts ; neither are his ways our ways. *We* cannot easily forgive, when we have been repeatedly injured ; but the compassion of God is abundant in pardon ; and though we grievously offend him, yet if we return and repent, he will still forgive us.

Let a knowledge of this important truth induce you, who are bewildered in the mazes of sin, and who are wandering in the paths of destruction, to return, like the penitent prodigal, to the house of your Father and Friend. The ways of vice are dark, intricate, and dismal. No light, no peace, no comfort can be found in them. The pleasures which it promised are soon experienced to be illusions. Your heart is torn with a thousand conflicting passions. Whithersoever you turn, the sharp points of conscience wound your soul. Would you remain in this painful situation, if you believed it possible to escape ? It is possible : divine revelation assures you that it is. The text authorizes me to declare, that there is a passage, through which you can flee : Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Perhaps you are conscious of having been guilty of so many offences, that you think it impossible that

you should obtain favour. You fear that you have outlived your day of grace, and that you have now no hope of pardon. But the mercy of God is not limited to any particular number of offences. It is a broad and deep ocean, of sufficient capacity to receive them all. Look into the sacred history, and you will find that atrocious sinners have been forgiven ; the idolatrous Manasseh ; the persecuting Paul ; Peter, who profanely and ungratefully denied his Master ; and even David, who was guilty of the crimes of adultery and murder. Some of these persons became afterward by their eminent virtues the ornaments of human nature. You perceive by these examples, that it is possible to reform, and to efface your sins, however black they may be.

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## SERMON X.

GOD REGARDS THE POOR.

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JOB xxxiv. 19.

NOR REGARDETH THE RICH MORE THAN THE POOR ; FOR  
THEY ALL ARE THE WORK OF HIS HANDS.

THE words now read are part of the speech of the wise young man, Elihu, to Job. They are in the form of a question ; but when they are changed into an affirmation, they express this truth, that God regardeth not the rich more than the poor ; for they all are the work of his hands. This sentiment is the subject of the present discourse.

It is not my intention to utter a declamation against wealth ; nor shall I attempt to prove, that the poor are happier than the rich. Such an opinion probably would not be admitted by my auditors ; and it is not maintained in the text. All which it asserts is, that God does not regard the rich *more* than the poor ; which assertion implies only, that the one is regarded as much as the other. That wealth may be productive of happiness, that it is a

blessing which descends from heaven, is evident. God bestows it on man as the instrument of good ; and the evil of it consists in its abuse. To say nothing of the physical enjoyments, which riches enable a man to purchase ; of the respect which they obtain ; of the rank, which they give him in society ; of the power, which they confer on him of indulging his taste for the fine arts and elegant literature ; all which are innocent pleasures, when the love of them is confined within the bounds of moderation : to say nothing of these things, must not that condition be desirable, which affords to the patriot the means of increasing the strength and welfare of his country ; to the encourager of learning, of endowing schools and colleges ; to the philanthropist, of adding to the comforts and alleviating the miseries of the indigent ; and to the Christian, of advancing the interests of religion, and erecting a temple to the Most High ?

Nor do I mean to assert, that there is no evil in poverty ; for poverty in the extreme must be allowed to be a serious calamity, which calls for the sympathy and benevolent aid of all, who are able to afford it relief. Hunger, and thirst, and cold, and nakedness, cannot by any charm of eloquence or poetry be converted into blessings. Like sickness and the death of friends, they are afflictions, to which it is the duty of a Christian to submit with patience and pious resignation ; but it is not requir-

ed of any one, that he should view them as pleasures. That God regards even this lowest class of the poor, that he has wise and gracious designs in the sufferings, which he inflicts on them, must be admitted, if we take into consideration, that there is a future, as well as a present, world, and that the Author of both worlds is a benevolent Being, who hates nothing, which he has made, who delights not in the misery of his creatures, but like a tender Father pities the wretched. I speak not of the needy, who are destitute of every comfort: they are not numerous in any country, particularly not here: I confine myself to the poor, who are deprived of the luxuries, and not a few of the conveniences, but still possess the necessaries, of life. This class of persons, who constitute the majority in every nation, if they are too much disposed to compare their situation with the condition of the wealthy, may fall into discontent; and may be ready to imagine, that they are not the objects of the care and kindness of Heaven: but I will endeavour to show, that God does not regard the rich, more than he regards them.

I. I, in the first place, observe, that poverty, in the view which we take of it at present, is the unavoidable result of institutions, which are beneficial to society. If the property, which is in any quarter of the globe, was to be equally divided among

and not of the poor man exclusively. We shall find on examination, that the labours of the rich are as irksome, as the labours of the indigent. The wealthy merchant, who plans a voyage, and who is perplexed with the intricacy of accounts, and vexed with the blunders, idleness, or unfaithfulness, of more than one person employed by him, toils at least as hard as the seaman and porter, who receive his wages. There is a pride, perhaps a pleasure, in commanding the services of others; but there is much more trouble in keeping them at work, than in working ourselves. The task of labourers, who have no other part to perform than to obey the orders given to them, is more simple, less responsible, and less embarrassing; and if there was not a charm in freedom, which fascinates the human heart, most men would find more enjoyment, as they certainly find more ease, in being guided by others in their pursuit of the necessary provisions of life, than in undertaking to guide themselves. The cares of the poor are not to be named with the anxiety of the rich. The objects, which they have to attend to, being few in number, their minds are not so much agitated with fearful thoughts. After the fatigues of the day, they can lie down on their beds, and enjoy there quietness and repose, without any apprehension of shipwrecks, of insolvent debtors, of robbers, or of ware-houses on fire.



IV. Some of the most valuable blessings, which God has bestowed on the human race, are love and friendship ; but these blessings are imparted with liberality to the poor. Among such of them as are virtuous, the mutual tenderness, which is felt and expressed by brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives, is the source of their highest enjoyments. This affection sweetens all their toils ; and nothing can be more pleasing or more edifying, than to behold the eagerness, with which the industrious man returns to his much loved home, after the labours of the day, and to witness the joy, which he diffuses into the hearts of his delighted family. The rich also, I grant, are not strangers to these pleasures ; and why should they be unknown to them ? Does it lessen the happiness of the poor, that love is found in the splendid mansion, as well as in the lowly cottage ?

V. The gospel is designed for the poor as well as the rich. In imparting this inestimable blessing, there is no respect of persons with God. There may be difficulties in divine revelation, which even learned and enlightened theologians cannot solve ; but none of these difficulties relate to its duties, which are simple and easily understood. The poor know what their Maker has required of them : they are acquainted with the evils which they ought to avoid, and the perfection and happiness to which

they should aspire. When they read the New Testament, they cannot doubt that God regards them ; for they will find there every comfort which they want. They will learn that the Saviour of men was sent to preach the gospel to the poor ; and that he honoured and sanctified a state of poverty, by appearing in the character of a poor man. Should it be granted therefore, that at present they are in a depressed situation, let not their hearts be troubled, since Jesus himself is their friend. If they obey his commands and imitate his example, they will sit with him on his throne, and everlasting joy will surround their heads.

VI. This important truth leads me, in the last place, to observe, that the bliss of paradise is promised to the poor as well as the rich. The present life is so short, that the mortifications and troubles, which are endured in it, are of small moment. When we arrive at last at the haven of felicity, where all are equal, or, to speak more accurately, where there is no superiority, except what is constituted by a superiority of piety and virtue, it cannot make any difference to us, whether our station during the voyage was high or low ; and we shall probably soon forget, whether we were commanders or common men. In estimating the kindness of our heavenly Benefactor, it is just that we should take into view the whole of our existence. Since

into embarrassments or ruin. Avoid those amusements, which encroach on the time that should be devoted to labour, which are too expensive, or which lead you too far, or too often, from home. Let your pleasure be found in doing your duty, and in making them, who depend on you, happy. Then will the divine blessing rest on your lowly dwelling ; and whilst the incense of grateful praise ascends each morning and evening to the throne of God, you will have reason humbly to hope, that the high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, will hear your prayers, that he will give you peace on earth, and blessedness in a future world.

5th S. after Epiph.

# SERMON XI.

THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF MARY.

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LUKE ii. 34, 35.

SIMEON BLESSED THEM, AND SAID UNTO MARY HIS MOTHER,—YEA, A SWORD SHALL PIERCE THROUGH THY OWN SOUL ALSO.

WHEN we read the history of Jesus, we are reminded of his mother, and of the important part, which she was called to perform in the system of divine Providence. The frailty of a woman introduces death into the world ; but a woman also introduces the restorer of life : a woman yields to the temptation of the serpent ; but the seed of a woman bruises the serpent's head : if Eve therefore dishonours her sex, the disgrace is forgotten in the glory of Mary. The mother of Jesus was of so excellent a character, that her memory is entitled to affection and respect. Whilst we sympathize with her in her joys and sorrows ; her purity, her humility, her maternal love, and her submission to the will of God, are interesting objects of contemplation.

ble old men, who, guided by a miraculous star, came from the east, to pay homage to him as to a sovereign prince.

These are the principal circumstances of a joyful nature, related by the Evangelists of the infancy of Jesus. They must have supported and comforted the heart of Mary under the severe trials to which she was subjected. The honour of being the parent of the glorious Messiah, who was proclaimed by angels, extolled by prophets, and acknowledged as a king by the sages of the east, must have appeared to her pious and humble mind an ample compensation for her poverty and affliction, and for all the persecutions which she endured.

There were besides many endearing circumstances, which, though they are not mentioned by the Evangelists, undoubtedly existed. She was a mother ; and her heart was filled with those pleasurable sensations which mothers only can describe, but which others know are present by the tenderness, and sometimes extacy, which appear in their eyes. Having often seen an affectionate mother shed tears of joy, when she was looking at the sweet innocence of her babe, we can believe that the blessed Mary hung over *her* son enamoured ; and that she contemplated with ineffable delight the divine lineaments of his face, the celestial radiance, which encircled his head.

There was one source of pleasure, which was almost peculiar to Mary. As Jesus was without sin, he was exempt from the usual faults of childhood. No petulance nor obstinacy was discovered in his temper. These frailties are frequently displayed at an early age ; and though an affectionate mother will easily pardon them, yet as they are a cause of uneasiness to herself and bitterness to her infant, she heartily wishes that he was free from the imperfection. Whatever afflictions Mary might suffer, she received none from the moral qualities of her child. Let us call on our imaginations to paint every lovely grace which can adorn an infant,—simplicity, innocence, artlessness, soft affection, and prompt obedience,—all these amiable endowments the infant Jesus possessed in the highest degree, and they rendered him the object of the ardent love of his happy mother.

The Evangelists give a brief account of the youth of Jesus : but they inform us, that as he advanced in age, he increased in wisdom, and in favour with God and man. The greatest part of his life was passed in retirement. This was a happy period for his mother ; for as his mind opened, he displayed uncommon vigour of intellect, an ardent thirst after divine knowledge, and the most gracious manners. It was manifest to his affectionate parent, that he was the object of the love of God, and that the benignity of his character had rendered him

dear to men. We are sometimes disposed to wish, that the Evangelists had seen proper to communicate to us the particulars of his early age ; but the wisdom of God has concealed these events from our eyes ; and we have nothing to assist us in our conjectures, but a knowledge of the perfection of his virtues. Two parts of his character in youth are however unfolded by St. Luke ; his love of wisdom, and his filial obedience. The former was exhibited on a visit to Jerusalem, when he was twelve years of age : for his mother, after an anxious search of several days, in which he had been lost to her sight, found him at length in the temple asking questions of the learned Jews, who then taught at Jerusalem ; and she witnessed with delight, that all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. She did not comprehend the reply, which he made to her gentle reproof, for the alarm and sorrow that he had occasioned ; but the other part of his character, his filial obedience, she could perfectly understand. With inexpressible satisfaction she beheld her son, the sublimity of whose mind her thoughts could not reach, subservient to her will, and exerting every faculty to render her happy. Sweet amidst her poverty and distress must have been the consolation of Mary derived from the affection and respect of such a child. Whilst she treasured up in her heart his words, and carefully observed his actions, the idea

that he, who was so wise, and great, and good, was her own son, that he loved, and revered, and obeyed her, must have afforded a never-failing fund of joy.

The youth of Jesus passed away, and the time appointed by the Father came, when he was to enter on the duties of his publick ministry. The prelude was his baptism in Jordan, where the holy Spirit descended on him, and filled him beyond measure with divine wisdom and power. Now, from a child in subjection to his parent, he became a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. His delighted mother heard with surprise of gracious words, such as no man before had ever spoken ; of miracles, such as no prophet had ever before worked ; and of sublime virtues, such as none of the sons of Adam had ever before practised, or even conceived. Retaining no longer the right to command, she sat at his feet as his humble disciple ; and she rejoiced with others of the pious, that her eyes saw the salvation of God.


Thus blessed was Mary in her son : the honour conferred on her was great, and her felicity extreme ; but the anguish of her soul was almost without a parallel ; for her heart was pierced with sorrow by Jesus. This constitutes the second part of my discourse, to which I now turn.



II. A succession of prophecies during four thousand years had prepared mankind for the reception of the Messiah : the sublime poets of Israel had sung the glories of his kingdom in magnificent strains : the world, which was in general expectation of his appearance, was hushed into peace, that no harsh sound of war might disturb the night of his nativity : and angels were sent from heaven, to usher in the prince of light with celestial harmony. How strongly do these splendid predictions and events contrast themselves with the meanness of his birth place ! He was born, not in Jerusalem, the city of the great king, but in Bethlehem, an obscure village of Judea ; not in the palace of his ancestors, but in a stable, because his indigent mother could not obtain admittance into the inn. The angel Gabriel had promised her, that the Lord God would give unto her son the throne of his father David, and that his kingdom would not come to an end, like the four great monarchies. As she probably understood the words in their literal sense, how severely must her faith have been tried, and her feelings wounded, by this unpromising and gloomy commencement of his life ! What prospect was there that he could ever become a sovereign prince, when none of his countrymen would receive him, or afford him a shelter against the rigours of the midnight air.

Not long after his birth, the life of Jesus was put in imminent danger by the persecution of Herod, who gave command to destroy all the male infants in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood, hoping to involve the young child in the general massacre; and nothing saved him from ruin, but the miraculous interposition of almighty God. The wretched mother was compelled to fly into Egypt, where she remained, banished from her country and friends, till the death of the tyrant; and when she returned to the land of Israel, she lived in constant terror that the son of Herod would imitate the jealous cruelty of his father.

The Evangelists give us no account of any farther sorrows of Mary during the infancy of Jesus: but as he was tried in all respects as other men are, we may suppose, that he was sometimes sick, and that the heart of his fond mother was sympathetically affected with his bodily pain. We may also suppose that he suffered in common with the family the inconveniences, of which poverty is the source; and that his parent, with that disinterestedness which is more frequently seen residing in the bosom of a mother than any where else, felt more for him than for herself. With the exception of these evils, and others of the same nature, the usual lots of humanity, we may presume that Mary passed her days: during the private life of her son, in general tranquillity and content. She saw indeed that he was



not yet a king, as Gabriel had foretold ; but as she was humble and pious, she probably dismissed all murmuring thoughts from her mind, resigned to the providence of God, and determined to wait with patience, till the will of heaven should be explained by events.

Her severest trials commenced, after Jesus had passed the period of youth. When he appeared before the eyes of the publick, she heard with pleasure his commanding exhortations, and saw with wonder his stupendous miracles ; but she perceived with pain, that he did not claim the throne of his father David, and that he even resisted all attempts to make him a king. As she was ignorant, in common with the rest of his disciples, of the true nature of his character, she did not yet comprehend that his kingdom is not of this world. She groaned with the rest of the inhabitants of Judea under the tyranny of the Romans. Loving her country, she ardently wished its deliverance from the iron yoke ; she hoped that her son would vindicate its independence ; but so unambitious was he of worldly honours and popular applause, that she began to fear that he would not undertake the arduous work. If he was not the king of Israel, what was he ? Doubts filled her heart ; her mind was perplexed with mysteries ; and she could find no clue, by which she could escape from the labyrinth.

The hatred and envy of the leading men of Judea also excited her alarms. Whilst Jesus relieved the poor, comforted the mourner, and bound up the wounds of the bruised, he reproached the Pharisees with their hypocrisy and avarice, and threatened them with the vengeance of God. Such bold invectives, she apprehended, would make him enemies. She feared, what in truth took place, that he could not long escape the effects of their jealousy and malice. She was exceedingly terrified, when she heard him declare, that he was going up to Jerusalem, where he should be betrayed into the hands of his implacable persecutors, who would inflict on him a cruel and shameful death; for though he added, that on the third day he should rise again, yet it is evident that she understood not the meaning of his words. Were then all her hopes to be levelled with the dust? Was he not the promised Messiah, who was to restore the kingdom to Israel? Was she to be deprived of a beloved son, and her country of its deliverer?

Accompanying him to Jerusalem, she soon saw him, as he had predicted, in the power of his enemies. He was betrayed by one of his chosen companions, and forsaken by all the rest. Adjudged guilty of death by the great men of the Jewish nation, he was delivered over to be punished by their masters, the Romans. She beheld him passing through the streets of Jerusalem, his temples pierced

with a crown of thorns, and bearing his cross, but so exhausted with fatigue, that he was not long able to support it alone. Having arrived at the place of execution, the soldiers rudely stripped off his clothes. With anguish of soul she saw the nails forced through his hands and feet : she heard the sound of the terrible hammer : \* she beheld the blood streaming from his wounds : she looked on the deadly paleness of his countenance : her ears were smitten with his terrifick cry : the spear was thrust through his side, and her own soul was pierced through also. Was it then any consolation to her, that her son, still cherishing to the last his tenderness for his mother, and forgetting his own anguish amidst his anxiety for her safety, committed her to the care of the beloved John ? She was indeed to be deprived of him forever, if another protector was necessary. She heard his dying groan ; and with it all hope expired.

With pleasure I turn again to the joys of Mary. The terrour and the anguish of her soul were extreme, but happily of short duration. On the third day Jesus, as he had foretold, rose triumphantly from the grave. He appeared to her and explained the nature of his kingdom ; and she now comprehended that it was not of this world. Every

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\* On entendit les coups des terribles marteaux. Télémaque, II.

mystery was unfolded, and all her doubts dispelled. She understood that the Messiah was sent to redeem mankind from sin and death, to establish the dominion of righteousness, to exalt his faithful followers, not to earthly but heavenly thrones, to manifest the glory of the Supreme Being, and to proclaim peace and reconciliation between God and man. During the period of forty days, she had the happiness of seeing and conversing with her son ; and when he ascended gloriously into heaven, to sit down on the right hand of his Father, she was present with the disciples, and looked at him with exultation, till a cloud concealed him from her sight. With a heart filled with gratitude for the salvation bestowed on her and the world, she probably passed the remainder of her days in tranquillity, under the protection of the benevolent John, expecting that blessed hope, even the manifestation of the glory of the great God, and of her Saviour Jesus Christ, once her humble and obedient son, but now her exalted sovereign and lord.

Such were the joys and sorrows of Mary. Every pious woman, every affectionate mother, must be interested in her story. Every daughter of Adam must rejoice in the glory conferred on her sex, in that a woman was chosen to be the parent of the Messiah. But mothers are frequently called to walk in the path, which Mary trod before them :

as they have similar blessings, they are also afflicted in a similar manner.

1. They have similar blessings. The satisfaction of being a mother undoubtedly exceeds any other, which this earth affords. When a child is born, there is produced that exquisitely contrived animal, the glory of the creation, whose eye looks to heaven, who stands erect on the earth like a cedar of Lebanon, who is sublime in manhood, and beautiful in infancy. We are accustomed to the beauty of young children; it makes therefore little impression on our senses, except when it is eminent in degree; but the truth is, it is possessed by all infants, as we may be convinced by comparing them with the most beautiful of the inferior animals. For are not the round limbs of a child to be preferred to the angles in the legs of a fawn; his smooth skin, to the fleece of a lamb, or the plumage of a dove; and the dimples of his cheeks and elbows, his soft lips, and delicate fingers, to the bony head, hard bill, and sharp claws of the most elegant bird? These charms, which adorn a child, are discerned by the eye of the mother, and the contemplation of them affords her ineffable delight.

In the most helpless period, even before the glimmerings of reason are perceived, an infant is lovely: but when the first dawnings of attention appear, when he can move without a support, when his

lisping tongue begins to utter the first sweet articulate sounds, what new pleasure does the parent feel ! When she surveys her family of young children, bounding with agility, gay yet innocent, simple and sincere, full of ardent curiosity, and making daily rapid progress in knowledge, watching with eagerness for her smiles, and bending toward her with looks of love, how does her bosom swell with joy ! The spectacle is interesting even to strangers ; but to the eye of a mother it affords the most perfect image of paradise.

If any thing can exceed this pleasure, it is the happiness of the mother, who has successfully conducted her son from infancy to youth, and whose enraptured eye now contemplates him in the bloom of life, enlightened, wise, and discreet, brave yet gentle, honourable, generous, and religious, rising with reputation in the world, and emulous to benefit his country by his talents and exertions ; yet still making his mother next to God, the first object of his attention and love, and valuing little the praises of others, if he cannot obtain her approbation. Speak, ye mothers, who have the happiness of possessing such a son, speak, for ye best can tell, what transport thrills through your heart, and with what fervour do ye return thanks to God for the inestimable gift !



2. These are the blessings which a mother enjoys : divine Providence has graciously vouchsafed to throw into her cup many sweet ingredients ; but alas ! she is frequently compelled to taste of the drops of bitterness. There are sons, who fill the breasts of their mothers with shame and sorrow. Ignorant of every branch of useful knowledge, corrupt in their principles, dead to all moral sensibility, and plunged into low and infamous vices, they pierce the hearts of their parents with unutterable pangs. But these representations belong not to my subject : I dismiss them. Children, who are not corrupt, who are innocent, and even virtuous, inflict sufficient pain.

The feebleness and numerous maladies, to which an infant is exposed, are a source of disquiet to an affectionate mother. She consumes many wearisome days and sleepless nights in watching over the bed of sickness, endeavouring in vain to assuage pains, of which the cause cannot easily be discovered, her ears all the while pierced with pitiable cries. She laments the distress of her child and fears that he will die. When he is in health, and out of her sight, she is alarmed with apprehensions that mischief will befall him. Mischief does befall him : he is killed by a sudden blow. The limbs, just now warm with life, become cold. She hangs over his innocent form, still lovely in death, and finds that the most difficult lesson which she has to learn is

resignation to the will of Heaven. Should he escape these accidents, constant care and laborious vigilance are necessary, to sow in his mind the seeds of virtue, and to pluck up the weeds of evil, which are scattered by the vicious who surround him, and against whose baneful example she cannot always guard. When he grows up to manhood, ill success sometimes attends him : for notwithstanding all the precautions of his foresight and prudence, he meets with misfortunes, which compel him to pass his days in poverty and obscurity. Her fond hopes are disappointed ; and her son, whom she expected to stand on the pinnacle of fame and shine in the world, lies in the dust, where he is spurned under the feet of the great, and insulted by the sons of prosperity.

But these evils are of small moment in comparison with that affliction, the recollection of which my subject suggests, the death of a son, who is accomplished and virtuous. I might attempt to describe fictions of this sort ; but as I know not that I have powers to make a representation appear natural, which exists in the imagination only, I shall speak of a real event, that I have known.

I was once acquainted with a woman, whose amiable manners had rendered her in youth the object of universal admiration, and who in mature age was esteemed by all who knew her for her good sense, discretion, and virtue. After the birth of

several children she was deprived of her husband, and at the same time of all the means of support. A benevolent friend gave her a small piece of ground, and a few kind neighbours, who pitied her distress, assisted her in building a cottage, where, by unremitted industry and extreme economy, she provided bread for her young family. Her house was the abode of neatness, harmony, and devotion : she gave thanks to God every morning and evening for raising up in her favour so many protectors and benefactors, and for blessing her and her offspring with so much peace and content. Among her children, all of whom were distinguished in the vicinity for their diligence, good behaviour, and love of their mother, she had one son, who was her darling. Though she endeavoured to conceal it, yet he was worthy of all her partiality ; for he was a youth obedient and affectionate, of noble principles, and a warm and faithful heart. Happy was he, when he attained an age, in which he was enabled in some measure to repay the attentions of his parent. He shipped himself as a seaman, made one successful voyage, returned home, and with an air of grateful exultation threw his little earnings into the lap of his mother. He again embarked, and several months passed away.—I was present, when a messenger came in, and told a short and dismal story : In one of the evolutions of the vessel, the boom struck his head and put an immediate period to

his existence. This event happened many years ago, when I was quite young ; but I never can forget her speechless agony and the dryness of her eye. Accustomed to see women weep over their afflictions, I thought it strange, that the death of such a son did not force from her a single tear.

Other catastrophes of the same kind, and of a more recent date, might be narrated ; but I forbear ; for I fear the recital of them would come too near the bosoms of some of my hearers. I would not renew their grief ; I would rather attempt to console them. I would with affectionate sympathy address you, who are afflicted mothers, and say : You have lost a son, who was amiable and wise ; but would you, if you could, annihilate all remembrance of a child, who was every thing, which your heart could desire ? You know you would not ; for amidst your tears the memory of his virtues is the source of delight. Your son is dead, but not lost forever. The gospel illuminates your mind with the rays of hope ; for Jesus, whose sufferings and death pierced the soul of Mary with anguish, is the resurrection and the life. He will restore the righteous son to the fond embrace of his pious mother. There is a world where all tears will be wiped away from your eyes, and where there will no longer be any disappointed expectations, or any separation of friends.

If the love of a mother surpasses all other love, you, who are a son, ought with the full measure of gratitude to return her affection. You are bound to her by the strongest ties: treat her with never-failing tenderness. She will love you, whatever may be your character; but let her have cause to glory in her child. Disappoint not her hope: do not by your vices plunge a sword into her bosom: do not break her heart: do not compel her to wish that God would hide her in the grave. Look unto Jesus, the pattern of every excellence. Love your mother as he loved his mother: obey, honour, cherish, and protect her, as he obeyed his earthly parent. Finally, imprint on your mind the words of the wise man: He that is obedient unto the Lord, will be a comfort to his mother. Remember that thou wast born of her, and how canst thou recompense her the things that she hath done for thee? Forget not then the sorrows of thy mother.

Purification of Mary.

## SERMON XII.

CANDOUR.

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1 COR. xiii. 5, 7.

CHARITY THINKETH NO EVIL,—BELIEVETH ALL THINGS,  
HOPETH ALL THINGS.

THE proper meaning of the word charity, in the praise of which St. Paul is so eloquent in this chapter, is universal love. This comprehensive virtue is divided into two branches, piety and benevolence. The first respects God ; the second, our neighbour. Benevolence, which intends the same thing as good will to mankind, is subdivided into several virtues ; one of the most important of which is candour. Candour is the subject of the present discourse.

Candour is that disposition of mind, which forbids us to think evil of our fellow men, and which leads us to form the most favourable opinion of their persons, knowledge, sentiments, and actions. It is peculiarly a virtue, which it is easier to recommend than to practise. Prejudices force themselves into the mind by so many avenues, that no modest man would choose to say of himself, I am candid.

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From many vices men may refrain ; but who can preserve himself from the want of candour ? If few persons can do it, who has a right to enjoin the virtue ? These questions would prevent me from proceeding farther in the subject, if they could not be answered by other questions : Can any one celebrate candour, without perceiving in himself a growing inclination to become her follower ? As she possesses so many amiable qualities, who can even think of her, without loving her ? who can behold her features, without discovering new charms, and new motives for admiring her ? In recommending candour therefore, I would hope to improve my own heart as well as yours.

We may exhibit, or be deficient in candour, in thinking or speaking, I. of the external qualities, II. of the knowledge and mental endowments, III. of the sentiments, and, IV. of the actions of our fellow men.

I. What is external is in a great measure, if not altogether, independent of men. They ought not therefore, it may be said, to be painfully affected by any opinion, which is formed of what their own agency was not concerned in producing. This may be true ; men however cannot forbear considering their external qualities as parts of themselves. An unfavourable judgment, pronounced on these quali-

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ties, is thought to be an injury scarcely inferiour to an imputation of vice. We may be candid or uncandid in the opinion, which we entertain of what is merely outward ; and it is evident that whilst the former is a happy disposition of mind, the latter is a disposition which ought to be avoided. A frequent cause of deficiency in this branch of candour is an ambition of the character of acute discernment. Every eye, it is supposed, is capable of discovering what is beautiful ; but a superior judgment is requisite to find out defects. We would charitably hope that the prejudiced opinions, which are formed of external qualities, do not generally proceed from an envious heart. This part of the subject perhaps may not be esteemed of much importance. But whatever tends to improve the temper, and of consequence to lessen the evils of life, is certainly important. That candour, which is exercised on what is merely external, will extend itself to other things ; for it is the same virtue under different modifications and appearances. A disposition which is inclined to think favourably of the persons, manners, and external accomplishments of men, will also candidly judge of their knowledge, sentiments, and actions. I would therefore recommend to you to seek for beauty in every object which you behold, and to overlook deformities. This direction of your sight will not only heighten your virtue, but it will also add to your happiness.



An eye, which is willing to be gratified, finds delight superiour to the pleasure which the affectation of discernment affords ; for, by the established constitution of nature, beauty always gives pleasure, whilst what is opposite to it gives pain. Thus even by this lower degree of candour you may multiply and increase causes of satisfaction. Upon this theme however I would not dwell, but proceed to consider the second kind of objects on which we may exercise candour.

II. These objects, as I have observed, are mental endowments and knowledge. There are various causes, which lead us to think unfavourably of the abilities of each other.

1. The most obvious is envy. When the knowledge of another man obscures our own, gives him a pre-eminence above us, or is in any way inconsistent with our interest, we are inclined to depreciate it, not only by speaking against it, but even by thinking of it unworthily. For we have such a command over our minds, that what we passionately wish to be true, we in time come to believe. There are however other causes less hateful than envy, from which the want of candour proceeds.

2. As our knowledge is of different kinds, we are disposed to think uncandidly of the acquisitions of other men. We know the value of the knowledge which is in our own mind, we can perceive

its uses, we remember the pains which it cost us to obtain it ; but none of these things can we see without us. We suppose that what is performed easily by another is not in itself difficult, though that ease may be the effect of previous labour. We are apt therefore to undervalue what we imagine can be done with so little effort ; and we are apt to judge uncandidly, if it is not done in the best manner possible. As our own knowledge is thus conceived to be the most difficult, so it is also imagined to be of the greatest importance. We too often judge that the acquisitions of other men are useless, and their exertions to obtain them unprofitable. Of what benefit, we inquire, can such things be to them or to the world ? The critick, who spends his time in the study of words, regards the discoveries of the astronomer as of small value. Of what use, says he, is it to determine whether the sun is greater or less than the earth ; or whether a planet has four moons or five ? The astronomer, on the other hand, thinks the labours of the critick equally unprofitable, and that it is the idlest thing imaginable to employ months and years in ascertaining the genuine readings of an ancient author. The mathematician is a dull, laborious slave in the eyes of the poet, whilst the poet appears to the mathematician a rhyming trifler.—These several studies are however of benefit to the world ; and the partial ideas, which we entertain respecting them, are forbidden by chris-

tian charity ; for they render us vain, prejudiced, and uncandid.

3. Another cause which leads<sup>1</sup> men to betray a want of candour in judging of the knowledge of their neighbours is this, that their taste is superiour to their abilities. It is difficult to attain perfection in any art or science, but it is comparatively easy to form an idea of it in our minds. We can know when an aspirant falls short of this perfection, though we ourselves cannot rise as high ; we can perceive his defects, though we are unable to mend them. In consequence of this cause how few are allowed to be eminent in their profession ! upon how few are we willing to bestow that applause which is due to their abilities ! Even when a man of splendid genius and the most enlarged attainments exhibits proofs of his knowledge and talents, we are ready to say, He does well ; but certainly he ought to do better. Such an error ought to be avoided : such a branch of science is absolutely necessary, and ought to be possessed by him : of this point he is partially informed ; and of that point he is totally ignorant.

4. These and sentiments of the like kind are instances of a want of candour. In judging in this manner, we are governed by prejudice, and do not make proper allowance for the dead weight, which soon brings to the ground even the wings of an eagle. Permit me then to recommend to you to

exercise candour, when ye think or speak of the knowledge and talents of your fellow men. Avoid, above all things, every species of envy. It is a base passion which ought not to inhabit the breast of a Christian. The abilities of another man are not mean, merely because they stand in your way ; they are not inferiour to yours, merely because you wish them to be so. Study also to obtain an acquaintance with human nature and with yourselves. A man, who has a just idea of his own abilities, will not be uncandid. For though he will perceive that he knows a few things, yet he will also be sensible that he is ignorant in many things. Reflecting on the pains that he has taken, to obtain the science of which he is possessed, he will be willing to acknowledge, that others may have exerted equal labour. As the knowledge with which he is endowed appears to him of great importance, he will be ready to confess, that the knowledge of others may appear to them important ; and that it may in fact be full as important. In fine, as he must be conscious of many defects in his own attainments, he will judge with candour of that want of perfection, which he observes in others.

5. A just idea of human nature destroys your prejudices and renders you candid. For look at men ; and do you find many very foolish, or many very wise ? What is called *common sense*, deserves the title which is given to it ; for it is in fact com-

mon. Few men are totally ignorant, and few men have much knowledge. The acquisitions of men are of different kinds ; but their real value may be the same, as they may contribute equally to the benefit of society. Some persons are more showy in their knowledge than others ; they have acquired the art of joining words aptly together ; but this art does not give them a right to judge unfavourably of the knowledge of others. For a man of splendid talents, an eloquent man, may not after all be acquainted with more truths, than a humble and reserved man, who lives and dies in obscurity. These considerations should teach us candour ; and they should deter us from imputing ignorance and folly to any one, who is not possessed of exactly the same kind of knowledge as ourselves. We are too ready to do this without sufficient grounds ; but because a person speaks absurdly on a subject, with which he is not acquainted, it does not follow that he is not well informed in others.

6. But what contributes more than any thing to render us candid in our opinions of the abilities of our fellow men, is an enlightened and improved understanding. They, who have only sipped at the fountain of science, are the least disposed to be pleased, the most inclined to be critical and severe, the most ready to find fault, and the most acute in discovering defects. A man of enlarged knowledge is acquainted with the difficulties, which obstruct the

path of science. He is sensible, that though he has frequently attempted to excel, yet that he has seldom, perhaps never, been able to attain the end proposed. Convinced that every human mind is limited, and that the best instructed persons soon disclose all that they know, he views with candid eyes those blanks of ignorance, which occupy such large spaces in the souls of other men. A man of extensive abilities also knows how difficult it is sometimes to distinguish wisdom from folly, what is genuine from what is spurious. As he cannot always determine whether his own tongue is uttering good sense or not, he will candidly pardon the speaker whom he hears, and the friend with whom he converses, if he sometimes discovers that they are not wiser than himself.

III. We are inclined then to think and speak uncandidly of the external qualities, and of the mental accomplishments of our fellow men; but we are still more disposed to judge uncandidly of their sentiments, in particular of their religious sentiments. In this case it is difficult to avoid a considerable degree of prejudice, and impossible perhaps to avoid it altogether. Such is the imperfection of the human mind, and so much exposed is it to be clouded with ignorance, error, and false ideas, that a man of complete candour in religion is a character not less rare than estimable. We would

wish to correct these faults in ourselves and others ; but we cannot expect fully to accomplish the desirable end. A degree of bigotry will still adhere to us, notwithstanding all our exertions to free ourselves from it. There are considerations however, which may in some measure check, though they will not entirely remove, the evil. To these considerations let us attend.

1. I would first observe, that candour and its opposite are not confined to any particular sect. There are men in all parties who are deficient in this virtue ; and it is not easy to determine what sect abounds most with them. We should, previous to a knowledge of the fact, suppose that they, whose sentiments are the most simple and rational, would be the most candid ; but experience will convince us that this is a doubtful point. There are men, whose minds, in our opinion, are enlightened with the blaze of truth, and who nevertheless are bitter and uncharitable. By candour therefore must not be understood the belief of any particular tenets. The word may be used in this sense ; but it has a different meaning. Candour ought not to be confounded with free inquiry ; for every man who inquires with freedom is not candid. The seat of candour is the heart, and not the head ; and the head may be improved, whilst the heart still remains under the dominion of prejudice.

2. This observation is adapted in some measure to remove our uncandid prejudices : and there are other considerations, which, if attended to, will produce the same beneficial consequences. When we reflect on the manner, in which men in general have obtained possession of the opinions, for which we are disposed to condemn them, we ought not to be surprised that they are tenacious of them, though they are frequently erroneous. The majority of mankind acquire their sentiments from education. Of consequence the majority of mankind have always believed some doctrines which are not true. For as men have ever differed from each other, in those points on which they differ, if one party is right, all the rest must be wrong. If, for example, the Calvinist believes the truth, the Arminian, in the doctrines in which he opposes him, cannot believe it : if the episcopal mode of church government is the best, the presbyterian cannot be the best. As truth and error therefore really exist, it appears to us as probable that the opinions, in which we have been educated, should be true as any others. But whether they are true or not, the fondness, which we always feel for the ideas impressed on our minds in early life, gives us a prepossession in favour of the sentiments, which we have received from education. Thus the majority of mankind always believe some doctrines which are erroneous. What then ? Is this any reason



why we should not exercise candour toward them? For do these errours affect their hearts? They probably do not. The Father of mercies beholds them with pity; and why should we regard them with spleen? He has said, that in every nation he who feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him; and what right have we to say the contrary? If that Being, to whom only his creatures are responsible for their errours, freely pardons them, we who are not injured by them, ought to imitate his example. Truth, it is confessed, is an invaluable treasure: it makes a man free, it makes him happy: but if the believers in the truth are the only good characters, what then will become of the rest of mankind?

3. Some men, rejecting the principles of their education, acquire their sentiments from books. They have a right so to do; but they run great hazards of missing the truth; for of the books, which have been written on doctrinal subjects, a large proportion are filled with errours. If they should read none except these erroneous books, their opinions would be as much corrupted by them, as they could be by education. After all, should they by reading arrive at the knowledge of the truth, such knowledge would principally be the effect not of choice, but of accident. For it depends chiefly upon accident what books are put into their hands by their instructors, what are recommended to them

by their friends, what they read merely because they are new, and what they peruse because they are written in a style which pleases them. Should they determine to read every thing, and judge for themselves, they may still miss the truth ; for the variety of contradictory doctrines, which they meet with, may so perplex their minds, that they may be unable to discover what is genuine ; and the consequence may be, a resolution to believe nothing, from the fear of believing falsehoods. These observations should induce men of letters to be candid to the unlearned : for though it is much more rational and meritorious to read and examine for ourselves, than to adhere without examination to the opinions of our childhood ; yet such inquiry will not infallibly be crowned with success. As the studious man therefore may possibly be in an error, as well as the man of no inquiry, it ill becomes the former uncharitably to condemn the latter. Neither the one party nor the other ought to be uncandid toward each other ; for the person, who has never examined a subject, cannot pretend that there is any crime in examination. He may suppose that some books are too heretical to be read ; but until he can obtain the vote of all mankind and determine what heresy is, he has no right to fix that character on any particular opinions, or on any particular author.

4. There are others, who have acquired their sentiments from themselves, without being indebted either to education or to books. They who adopt this plan, think it the best of any ; for they say, if an inquirer takes common sense for his guide, it is probable that the most important truths will discover themselves to him. But neither is this method infallible : Because a fondness for finding out something new may lead a person to embrace absurd opinions. Most of the possibilities and relations of ideas have been long since exhausted : for which reason what is absolutely new is generally false ; but of such new opinions men are apt to be tenacious. It has cost them great pains to invent them : they are the works of their own hands, their own children ; and they have for them the same partiality, which all parents feel for their offspring. Persons of this character ought peculiarly to cultivate candour : they ought not to be positive, and uncharitably to censure others for not embracing opinions, in the belief of which perhaps they stand alone. The opposite parties ought also to be candid : For has not an inquirer a right to draw his opinions from himself, when he finds the sentiments of others are in general so contradictory and absurd ? These persons ought to consider, that the man whom they condemn, if he is erroneous, may not be intentionally in an error. He may have exerted his faculties with honesty and impartiality ; and though he

has not obtained the truth, yet it is a mere misfortune, and no crime.

5. In a word, in whatever view we regard the opinions of men, we find every reason for exercising candour. We are too apt to be shocked with sentiments, which differ from our own; but this ought not so to be; for the speculative sentiments of men have scarcely more influence on their morals, than the colour of their faces, or even the clothes which they wear. Whilst honesty, benevolence, and piety are to be found in all sects and parties, we ought candidly to confess that no class of opinions whatever are peculiarly adapted to make men vitious. We are disposed to think those doctrines dangerous, to which we have not been accustomed, and with which we are little acquainted; but this is a prejudice which we ought carefully to remove; for what appears thus new to us, and too pernicious ever to be maintained, may be nothing more than the revival of a doctrine, which existed in a former period of time, or perhaps the revival of truth itself. On the other hand, they, who dissent from the multitude, are prone to charge them with weakness, absurdity, and superstition; but these censures are unworthy a philosopher, a man of candour, a Christian; for though the sentiments, which are established are not, for that reason, true, yet they are not, for that reason, false.

6. These observations chiefly respect doctrines, which are unessential ; and most doctrines, about which men differ, are of this kind : for Christians generally agree in important points. This remark furnishes another and a cogent reason, why we should be candid ; for surely it is not less absurd, than it is destructive of peace, uncharitably to censure men for maintaining doctrines, when it is not of much consequence, whether they believe or disbelieve them. Practice is every thing ; and the necessity of practice all men acknowledge. Every Christian confesses that piety to God and good will to mankind are the first of obligations, and that holiness is indispensably requisite to make us happy here and hereafter. Christians, it is true, express themselves variously on these subjects ; but from the imperfection of the human understanding and the still greater imperfection of language, such variations are unavoidable. What rational man, what man of benevolence, will banish candour from his bosom, merely on account of a difference of expressions ?

7. When Christians learn to think candidly of their brethren, who embrace opposite sentiments, they have made great progress in this amiable virtue ; but in order to be complete in candour, it is necessary to proceed one step farther. As many persons, particularly they, whose tempers are warm, imagine their own opinions to be, not only evident

in themselves, but of the utmost importance ; so they likewise suppose that the opinions of others are pernicious as well as erroneous. Hence prejudice and bigotry enter the mind ; and they are led to pronounce their sentences of condemnation, more perhaps from the love of what they conceive to be truth, than from a want of benevolence. A Christian of a liberal and enlarged mind will candidly judge of persons, who are thus deficient in candour. When we hear one man railing against hereticks and schismatics, and another against the superstitious and enthusiastick, we ought not at once to conclude that they are not, on the whole, pious and virtuous Christians. Human nature is so mixed a thing, it is in general so blended with good and evil, that bigots sometimes possess estimable qualities. They whose minds are filled with inveterate prejudices, may be sincere : and though they violate one of the most essential laws of the gospel, the law of charity, yet they may think all the while that they are doing God service. Experience may convince us that some of the warmest zealots are men of humanity, where religious sentiments are out of the question ; and whilst they anathematize the wretch, whose opinions are not exactly the same as their own, they may at the same time pity him and lament his fate, and cheerfully relieve him from temporal distress. These considerations should lead us to be candid to the

prejudiced, to be candid to the bigoted, to be candid to the uncandid, to be candid to them, even when they condemn us as erroneous and the enemies of the true religion.

IV. We think uncandidly then of the external qualities, of the knowledge, and of the sentiments of our fellow men ; finally, we are also disposed to judge uncandidly of their actions. Of actions, it must be confessed, we can more easily judge than of other objects ; and of actions we have a better right to judge. The knowledge and sentiments of men cannot so readily be known to us. Their sentiments are easily concealed ; and even with respect to their knowledge, reserve and silence may throw so much obscurity over it, that we cannot always determine, whether a man is foolish or wise. But the actions of men are more open to us : they are continually producing to view the effects of the causes, which exist in their bosoms ; and these effects must partake either of the nature of vice or virtue. Of actions then we can judge, because we can see them : Of actions, as I have said, we have, in some measure, a right to judge, because merit and demerit belong only to them. That we know men by their fruits, that their moral character depends on the quality of their deeds, is a truth which is generally acknowledged.

Men, presuming on this truth, suppose that they may lawfully censure the actions of their neighbours, when they appear to be vicious. It is even their duty, they think, not only to approve virtue, but to condemn vice, and to hold it up to the scorn and detestation which it deserves. That it is their duty to a certain extent, must be admitted ; there is room however for candour, when we judge or speak of the actions of mankind.

1. For, first, though we have a right to condemn vice, where it appears, yet we have no right to presume that it exists, where it does not appear. This presumption however is common ; and harsh censures are the consequences of such rash conclusions. How ready are we to attribute actions which seem to be good to bad motives ! Is a man liberal in his donations ? We ascribe it to any cause rather than to generosity. He is ostentatious, we say. Or he is endeavouring to make interest, in order to promote some sinister design. On the other hand, is a man economical ? His motive may be a desire to set a good example amidst an age of extravagance ; or perhaps the principle of honesty itself ; for he may be in debt, and may think that he has no right to be profuse with the property of his creditors. But we are willing to imagine that he is parsimonious. There is scarcely one good action that a man of virtue can perform, which a person who is destitute of candour is not capable



of attributing to a bad motive. In his eyes the humble man is base ; the condescending, mean ; the modest, precise ; the man of dignity, proud ; the pious, a hypocrite. Such judgments imbitter our tempers, and whilst they render us severe, they make us unhappy. True it is, that they who seem to be virtuous, are sometimes vitious ; and true it is, that actions which appear to be good, sometimes proceed from bad motives : But because such things may be, why should we always suppose that they exist? Or because there is a mixture of imperfection in all human actions, why should we at once pronounce, that nothing but imperfection prevails? The modest man may be in some degree vain ; the generous may not be altogether without selfishness ; even the man of real piety may be too precise and formal. But ought we to form our opinion of such characters from their few defects, or from their many virtues? As no man is wise at all hours, so no man is always virtuous : but we ought to denominate him wise and virtuous, who is wise and virtuous on the whole.

2. We may discover a want of candour, not only in attributing good actions to a bad motive, but also in attributing bad actions to the worst motive. It is an observation, which is justified by experience, that no man loves vice for its own sake. The heart, before it is debauched by the practice of immorality, prefers good to evil. No person

therefore sins in the first instance, because he loves sin itself ; but the cause of his sinning is this, that there are planted in his breast a strong desire of happiness, and aversion from pain. The former he cannot forbear pursuing ; the latter he cannot forbear avoiding. When he deviates from virtue, he is urged on by the hope of obtaining some pleasure, or of delivering himself from something disagreeable. If he believed that he could effect his purpose as well by laudable as by culpable means, he would undoubtedly prefer the former to the latter. For I appeal to the experience of all, who have ever yielded to temptation, whether they would not, in every instance, rather have followed the bliss, which appeared before them, by the path of virtue, than by the path of vice ? I am far from intending by these observations to justify sin : No, it is always hateful and pernicious : However it may flatter for a time, it cannot in the end afford genuine happiness ; and no man is irresistibly impelled to commit it ; for there are in every person's bosom sufficient motives to induce him to avoid it :—I would not justify sin : I design only to make you candid toward sinners. For it is evident, if what I have remarked is true, that instead of ascribing the actions of bad men to the worst motive, we ought to ascribe them to a motive bad indeed, but as far removed as possible from the worst. They who have studied human nature confess, that

there is little unmixed malice in the world. Men much more frequently transgress from levity, vanity, caprice, passion, and other principles of a less atrocious kind, than from hatred or revenge.

3. We are also deficient in candour, when we judge a man to be habitually vitious, because he has committed one bad action. The opinions, which we form of each other in these cases, are unkind. If the honest man commits one dishonest action ; if the generous is in one instance mean ; if the pious utters one profane word ; if the temperate is once overtaken by drunkenness ; we have no mercy ; we resign the character without compassion to infamy. The unhappy person may have bitterly repented of his crime ; he may have made his peace with heaven ; but *we* cannot pardon, *we* refuse to acknowledge that his mind can be pure, because it has once been defiled. This judgment is uncandid ; for the character of a man ought to be determined, not from what he was, but from what he is now. Unless we deny the possibility of reformation, we ought to forget the sins, which men neither have repeated nor desire to repeat ; unless we wish to drive the repentant sinner to despair, we ought to spare the tongue of censure, when he shows by the change of his conduct, that he is sorry for his offence.

4. We also discover a want of candour, when we do not make proper allowance for the frailties

of human nature. The Psalmist says, That God knoweth our frame, that he remembereth we are but dust. In judging of the actions of each other, we also ought to remember and consider what men are. They are not irrational animals ; but they are far below angels. They are composed of bodies as well as minds ; and the corporeal part bears a large proportion to the mental. By such a class of creatures great and virtuous actions may be performed ; but we must expect to find many instances of imperfection. Even angels, if they considered human nature justly, would not condemn it with severity ; but we men, who partake of the same frailties, who are exposed to the same weaknesses and faults, ought to be indulgent to each other.—From the frailty of human nature proceeds that inconsistency of conduct, which may be observed in the best of men. Hence it is, that the prudent are sometimes rash ; that the liberal sometimes turn a deaf ear to the poor ; that the moderate are sometimes impetuous ; that the meek and gentle are sometimes proud and angry. Who can always command his temper, when provoked by scorn ? Who can always maintain a resigned frame of mind, when misfortunes press so thickly upon him, that it is impossible to escape them, when sickness consumes, when poverty threatens him, and when both his body and soul are so debilitated, that they are no longer capable of sustaining his infirmity ? If in

such cases men become peevish, if they are led to speak unadvisedly with their lips, let us not conclude, that they are totally destitute of fortitude and equanimity.—We ought also to make candid allowances for the frailties, which are peculiar to certain ages of life, as well as for the general imperfection of human nature. In infancy we must expect to find thoughtlessness and levity ; in youth we must look for passion, a fondness for pleasure, and an aversion from restraint ; in manhood we must expect distrust, ambition, and an excess of prudence. But if the infant is simple and docile ; if the youth is honourable, generous, brave, and sincere ; if the man is moderate, indulgent, and affectionate ; we ought to forgive their unavoidable imperfections. If candour was adhered to, youth would pardon the gravity of age ; and age, the vivacity of youth.—It is from the imperfection of human nature, that men find it so difficult to preserve a due medium in their actions. Such is the force of habit, and so apt is it to become rooted in the character, when it has obtained possession of it, that it is almost impossible to keep ourselves from extremes. As the perfection of virtue however consists in moderation, or in balancing and qualifying one action by another, it is evident that few men can attain this perfection. This consideration should induce us to judge candidly of each other. One man supposes that frankness and sincerity are

the first of virtues, that every good man ought to carry his heart in his hand, that it is his duty to be cheerful, that a solemnity of face is generally a cheat, and that hypocrisy is the last of crimes. How prone will this person be to be too open, too undisguised, too cheerful ! But should we not betray a want of candour, if we severely censured him merely for the excess of what is amiable and praiseworthy ? Another person considers seriousness as the best of all habits. The business which his Maker has committed to him to transact appears of such moment, that it ought to preclude all levity and mirth. He carefully avoids every idle word, and endeavours to fix his whole attention on heavenly objects. Such a person will be apt to become too grave and gloomy ; but let us not on that account uncandidly condemn so good a man. In like manner, the man of dignity, who imagines that the most effectual preservative against the meanness of vice is self-reverence, will be exposed to have his character debased by a small degree of pride. On the other hand, the man of a condescending, humble, and gentle disposition is in danger of becoming too easy and compliant. His character may in general be innocent ; but he may sometimes yield to temptation, from diffidence, and from an obliging temper. In both these cases we ought charitably to forgive the excesses, which proceed from such laudable principles ; and if we cannot quite forgive

the condescending and diffident man, we ought at least to reprove him with tenderness.

5. We ought also, when we judge of human actions, to make candid allowance for the unavoidable defects of moral and religious education. One man is born amidst the happiest advantages. His parents are pious and virtuous. In infancy he is taught to know and fear God, to obey his laws, to rely on his protection. He early receives a taste for devotion. The best examples are continually placed before his eyes; and he is instructed by them, as well as by precept, that the practice of honesty, purity, and humanity, constitutes the felicity of man. His situation in life is that which is most favourable to virtue. Equally removed from the extremes of poverty and wealth, he finds no temptations to commit the vices which are peculiar to either station. Success crowns his exertions; and though he sometimes is deprived of a friend, and meets with other calamities, yet all his afflictions are of that kind, which are adapted to refine and soften the heart. From such a person we have a right to expect high degrees of virtue. If he falls into vice, if he becomes intemperate, dishonest, selfish, or profane, we may lawfully censure him.—But there is another person whom we ought to view with more indulgence. He is born under every possible disadvantage. His parents are of the most vile and abandoned characters, intemperate,

dishonest, contentious, malicious, obscene, profane. Their ignorance prevents them from knowing the advantages of an education. He enters the world therefore unacquainted with every thing, except the practice of vice. In the world he combats with poverty and wretchedness. As he never was instructed in a manual art, he is incapable of procuring a subsistence in any other way, except common labour ; and from this he has a strong aversion, as no pains have been taken to communicate to him the habits of industry. He is compelled to associate with the lowest and worst company, as he has no means and qualifications of rising to any other. The effect of all these causes is, that he is a pernicious member of society, idle, intemperate, profane, dishonest. He runs a short career of iniquity, and perhaps at last is taken away by an untimely death. The character whom I have now described is certainly very wicked, as well as very wretched. But how many reasons have we for exercising candour, when we judge of him ! and with what compassion ought we to behold him ! For he is an immortal being, corrupted by bad example and ruined by the want of education. He has sinned, not so much from deliberation, as from frenzy ; through life his mind has been agitated, intoxicated, maddened ; and though that divine spark, whence proceeds all virtue, has not been totally extinguished,—for who can extinguish it ?—yet it has been so



effectually smothered, as to be incapable, in this state of trial, of emitting any light. To condemn with un pitying severity this character, because he is not as virtuous as the person first described, is like requiring that thorns should produce grapes, and thistles figs.

6. On the whole, in whatever view we regard the actions of men, we perceive many motives for exercising candour. They, who have experienced few of the difficulties which attend a virtuous course, who being far removed out of the reach of the strongest temptations, are unacquainted with their force, may be disposed to be uncandid ; they may severely censure the slightest deviations : but when they consider what human nature is, when they reflect on their own frailty, the frequent faults which, notwithstanding all their advantages, they have committed, they will learn to be more candid. There are Christians, who are disposed to overlook their own imperfections, whilst they treat the imperfections of others without mercy. They seem to think that they shall by these means compound for their peculiar vices, or at least ward off the censures of the world. To such persons I would recommend the study of their own characters. Let them endeavour to become acquainted with their own hearts, and to reform what is amiss in their own conduct. Self-examination will afford them sufficient employment, and leave them no time to censure the con-

duct of their brethren. This advice is conformable to the precepts of our blessed Saviour. Let him, said he in a memorable instance, let him who is without sin, cast the first stone. Again, Why beholdest thou the mote which is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam which is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote which is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam which is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then thou shalt see clearly to pull out the mote which is in thy brother's eye. The man, who has repented of his own vices, will view his brethren, who are still under the dominion of sin, with compassion and affection, not with severity or ill-will. He will desire, he will endeavour to reform them, as he knows by experience that the paths of wickedness lead to misery and destruction; but the means, which he employs to effect this benevolent purpose, will be kind words, and charitable exhortations.

I have thus endeavoured to recommend candour; and I would now conclude my discourse with entreating you to become acquainted with this amiable virtue. Cherish her as your companion; embrace her as your friend. Her presence will diffuse peace through your minds, and calm the tumults, which severity and censoriousness excite in her

absence. Forget not however to associate her with every other virtue; for the virtues appear to the best advantage in each other's society, and are in general inseparable companions; when one is banished, the rest will be inclined to depart. I exhort you therefore in the words of the Apostle Peter: Add to your faith, fortitude; and to fortitude, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

S. before Lent.

## SERMON XIII.

THE ENTICEMENT OF SINNERS.

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PROV. i. 10.

MY SON, IF SINNERS ENTICE THEE, CONSENT THOU NOT.

WHAT is the cause of sin? is a question on which speculative men have been much divided. Many solutions have been attempted; but none has been given, which has satisfied all parties. Some have attributed it to the abuse of principles, which are in themselves good and useful; others, to a nature originally corrupt; a third party, to the temptation of the Devil; and a fourth, to the influence of the Supreme Being himself, who hates the sin, which he has created. But whatever the cause of it may be, the fact is certain that it exists in the world, and that it is both destructive of our happiness, and displeasing to God. To extenuate the guilt of it, we may lay the blame of it upon nature; but our consciences testify that this excuse is not satisfactory. When we commit it, we feel that we do wrong; we feel that we could have done otherwise; and we are convinced, that we are chargeable with crimi-

nality, and that we may be justly punished. It is our duty therefore, instead of endeavouring to justify it by arguments which, though they may be specious in theory, are yet practically false, and dangerous to act upon;—it is our duty to guard ourselves against it with the utmost caution, and to avoid, in particular, the temptations which may lead us to evil. One of the strongest of these temptations is the bad example of the wicked. Whilst there are around us depraved men, who are continually enticing us, our situation is extremely perilous. We need look no farther than to them for the cause of sin. There may be other causes; but the pernicious example of a corrupt multitude from whatever source it originated, is alone sufficient to keep the world corrupt, and to make it degenerate still more and more.

Solomon, who in his system of morals has shown us what constitutes the business, the dignity, and happiness of human nature, has, in the introduction of his Proverbs, given us a caution against yielding to the temptations of the wicked: My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. He knew that virtue is rendered difficult by the degeneracy of mankind, and that the most dangerous foes to the practice of it are examples of iniquity. It was necessary therefore to warn the young of what they might expect. It was necessary to warn them, that

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they would not be suffered to remain unmolested in the paths of innocence ; and that the first preparative of a holy life was a fear of being overcome by temptation.

We have in our constitution, passions and appetites, which are given to us for wise purposes ; but which, when they are abused, are the sources of guilt and wretchedness. These passions would seldom be perverted from their right ends, if we were not influenced by the evil example of others. If we saw no persons around us sin, we should not dare, we should not even think of sinning. Our passions would be always gentle breezes, if they were not excited by the breath of the licentious. Who would inflame his spirits with wine, if there were no sinners to entice him to mad revelry ? Who would violate truth, if by doing it, he became a solitary liar ? Who would dare to be a knave, if dishonesty was unknown in the world ? Where is the man to be found, who would venture, however strong his passions might be, to commit the first crime ; to make the first breach on the laws of God ; to be the first to introduce confusion into the constitution of nature ? Without temptations from surrounding sinners, temptations within would hardly be sufficient to force men into vice.

This observation shows that our principal care ought to be to guard ourselves against the enticings of the wicked, and the contagion of evil example.

In running the career of virtue, the laws of God and our consciences direct us to the right path. It is the irregular conduct of others, which chiefly draws us aside. We follow whither the degenerate lead ; for if there were no degenerate to lead, we should venture alone into the crooked paths of vice, into the wilderness of guilt. Alone we should brave all the dangers of the place. Society prevents us from seeing the horrors of the dismal region. We wander to destruction, because we are allured on by companions ; for without companions we should hardly dare to stray.

But the opinions and practices of the wicked, however numerous, cannot alter the nature of vice. Its hatefulness does not lessen, in proportion as it becomes prevalent. In every circumstance and situation, it is a violation of the laws of God, and destructive both of present and future happiness. A man is not less guilty, because he has associates in guilt ; and he will not be less miserable, because he will have companions in misery.

Consider these truths, my brethren, and let them be the guides of your moral and religious conduct. Imitate not the vices of a degenerate age. When sinners entice thee, consent thou not ; consent not with thy actions ; consent not even with thy will. Enter not into the path of the wicked ; and go not into the way of evil men. Avoid it ; pass not by

it ; turn from it, and pass away. For the way of the wicked is as darkness : they know not at what they stumble. They discern not the rocks and chasms, which obstruct their steps ; for their eyes are blinded, and a horrible gloominess overwhelms them.

1. If the temptation which allures you is the hope of enriching yourself by plunder, yield not to its solicitation. If you are enticed to commit robbery either on the land or sea, and the sons of rapine say to you, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause : Let us swallow them up alive as the grave, and whole, as those who go down into the pit : We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil : Cast in thy lot among us, let us all have one purse : My son, walk not thou in the way of them ; refrain thy foot from their path. For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. Thou seest thy danger ; thou seest that a snare is prepared for thee ; and unless thou art more foolish than a bird, thou canst avoid it. For they lay wait for their own blood, they lurk privily for their own lives. So is the way of every one who is greedy of gain ; who taketh away the life of the owner thereof.



2. If you are enticed to any other species of dishonesty, which, though not so immediately exposed to the vengeance of human laws, is however not less criminal than robbery, and not less odious in the sight of God ; combat the temptation with manly courage. If any gain is proposed to you, which you must acquire by equivocation, by sinister means ; if it is suggested to you that the guilt will be lessened by being divided among a multitude ; that you will escape detection ; that you will still preserve your reputation for integrity ; turn, I beseech you, a deaf ear to the enticing words : For though man does not discover the fraud, yet God sees it ; and though human laws do not condemn you, yet the just Judge of all the earth will assuredly punish you. Nay, the time will soon come, when you will be both condemned and punished by man. Your reputation, which is not yet blown upon, will ere long be tainted. The success of your first crime will lead you on to commit more. A habit of fraud will be acquired and confirmed. Your character will be known. You will be sensible yourself that it is known ; and that you merit and receive the scorn and detestation of your neighbours. You will, at length, dare to be an open cheat, and to show your brazen forehead without a mask.

3. If you are enticed to gaming, let not a fear of appearing unfashionable or penurious induce you to

yield. Many alluring, but false arguments will be laid before you. You will be told, that it is impossible to keep large companies in spirits without play ; and that it is not easy to play with delight, unless the attention is kept awake by a motive of interest. It will be hoped, that you are not afraid of your money ; and that you are not so mean as to be afflicted with the loss of a few shillings. In answer to these arguments, show by the cheerfulness of your behaviour, that gaming is not necessary to keep up your spirits. Manifest by the ingenuity of your conversation, and your address in making others converse ingeniously, that you have the power of entertaining others, and of being entertained yourself. Prove by your donations to the poor, and your readiness to risk your property on all lawful occasions, that parsimony has no place in your breast. But if by a conduct founded on these principles, you find that you cannot act your part in large companies with success ; you know what you have to choose : You must preserve your innocence, even should you be thought unfashionable ; you must, though you should be derided as scrupulous, resist the temptations which would impair your virtue. That gaming may be, and that it generally is, pernicious and criminal, you cannot deny. For not to mention that it puts an effectual stop to that flow of sentiment which is both entertaining and instructive ; not to mention that it impairs the health,

and causes the roses of the complexion to fade, by the midnight watches which it occasions ; not to mention these things, it is well known that it introduces ungracious passions into the mind. Can you game deeply, without feeling that the fiend of avarice has taken full possession of your souls ? Are not your breasts distracted with anxious hopes and fears ? Are not your tempers irritated ? Are not the few words, which you speak, either peevish or boisterous ? Do you not regard him who wins from you, as your enemy ? and do you not, when you lose, sink into despondency ? If you answer the questions in the affirmative, as you know they must be answered, to what do you sacrifice your health and your happiness, the tranquillity of your minds, and the gentleness of your tempers ? To the love of pleasure ? No ; but to the love of gain. Pleasure is your plea ; but avarice is your motive. This foul passion exposes you to the hazard of defrauding the poor, your family, your own creditors, of their just dues, by what you lose ; or of defrauding the families and creditors of others, by what you win. For this do you forego the sweets of domestick life, and the harmless amusements, which are found at home, and which neither impair your estate, nor fill your heart with remorse.

4. If you are allured to intemperance by the votaries of pleasure ; if you are invited to take a

part in the scenes of intoxication ; let not any flattering promise of merriment beguile you. For consider who hath wo ? who hath sorrow ? who hath contentions ? who hath babling ? who hath wounds without cause ? who hath redness of eyes ? They who tarry long at the wine, they who go to seek the strongly seasoned wine. Look not upon the wine, when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. So says Solomon ; and changing the form of his questions, we may ask, Does not intoxication introduce embarrassment into your worldly affairs ? Does it not deprive you of the confidence of your neighbours ? Does it not subject you to wounds, and at last to the entire loss of health ? In the revels of drunkenness, are not all your joys madness ? Man is not made for the transports which you suppose wine will afford. When his pleasures pass a certain boundary, their nature is changed, and they become pains. Have you not ever found it to be so, you who have gone to the house of riot, with the expectation of finding exquisite delight, but have returned with disappointment and vexation ? Why then will you, when thus instructed by experience, obey the delusive call, and yield to the enticing of sinners, who are alluring you to destruction ?

5. Finally, if you are enticed to any other sin, yield not to the temptation. In the world, you will find many snares laid for your innocence. Some of them ought not be named ; for there are ideas, which in a measure contaminate your purity, by barely passing through the mind. It is sufficient that you know your danger ; inquire not too minutely what that danger is. Actions will be proposed to you of so dubious a nature, that you can with difficulty determine whether they are harmless or not ; but if you feel any pressure at the heart, avoid them. This reluctance of conscience may possibly be a prejudice of education ; but in the hour of temptation it is safest to trust its warning. In a cooler moment afterward, when you are alone, you can examine it ; and if you find that it is a mere prejudice, you can reject it from being a principle of conduct. Be ever on your guard against evil, preserving your minds attentive and calm. Continual care and much pains are necessary to maintain your innocence. Your conflict is arduous ; but you are animated by the most powerful motives. Remember that the eye of God beholds you, and that whilst you remain virtuous, it beholds you with approbation. Remember the design, for which you were created ; that you are intelligent beings, moral agents, candidates for immortality. If you courageously resist the enticement of sinners ; if you act your parts well ; if you show yourselves true

servants of God, and faithful disciples of Jesus Christ ; you will be placed in a region, where you will be out of the reach of temptation ; where a confirmed habit of virtue will secure you against falling into vice ; and where your moral powers being continually improved, you will increase in knowledge, in holiness, and in felicity to all eternity.

1st S. in Lent.

# SERMON XIV.

## IRRESOLUTION.

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JAMES i. 6.

HE THAT WAVERETH IS LIKE A WAVE OF THE SEA, DRIVEN WITH THE WIND, AND TOSSED.

It appears from an examination of the verses, which precede and follow the text, that the design of the Apostle James is to condemn wavering or irresolution in praying to God ; but as he expresses himself in indefinite terms, his sentiment may be applied to other cases. I will thus apply it in the following discourse ; in which I will endeavour to point out the mischievous effects of irresolution, first, in the choice of our religious sentiments ; secondly, in our prudential conduct ; and, thirdly, in our moral conduct.

I. In the choice of our religious sentiments, and an external profession conformable to them, it is pernicious to hesitate too long, or to be irresolute in fixing. It is, I confess, the duty of a Christian to

inquire after truth during his whole life, and to preserve his mind open to conviction. If he finds reason to change his sentiments, he ought to do it, nay, he cannot avoid doing it, even when he has passed far beyond the period of youth. There is no want of resolution manifested in this change; for he ought not to resolve to adhere to doctrines, after he has discovered them to be erroneous. A man of a cool and candid mind will always remain in a state of suspense, where there is not sufficient evidence to determine his opinion. He will not, in this case, suffer prejudice, or fancy, or interest, to turn him; but will persevere in seeking after more light, and will at length yield to nothing except superiority of argument. There are persons, who have materially changed their religious principles late in life. I call them not irresolute; for they have seen sufficient cause for renouncing their former creed. They have acted like honest and humble inquirers, who have not been ashamed to acknowledge that they were wrong, and who have dared to correct their mistakes.

But when we have obtained all the satisfaction, which the nature of the case admits, we ought no longer to hesitate. On each side of almost every question something may be said. For as the human understanding is imperfect and can see in part only, difficulties and objections may appear against probable truths, and may in some measure counte-



nance the opposite errors. In this state of things what is a man to do? He is not to doubt forever; he is not to withhold his belief, because he cannot find absolute demonstration; but he ought to submit to the strongest and most weighty arguments. In choosing, for instance, between the belief of Christianity and deism, a man ought not to waver, because specious objections may be alleged against the gospel; but if arguments preponderate in its favour, if there is a respectable weight of evidence which proves its truth and divinity, he ought to reject deism and to admit Christianity. Again, in choosing between two opposite opinions, which are each of them supposed by different sects to be doctrines of the bible; he ought not, because a few obscure texts may be produced in favour of the one, to hesitate in assenting to the other, for which there are many clear passages. I will give an example to illustrate my observation: It is asserted by certain Christians, that good works are not necessary to salvation, an opinion which reason cannot forbear considering as injurious to the cause of virtue, and which therefore we ought not hastily to adopt. It cannot be denied that some dark expressions in St. Paul's Epistles, when they are taken separately, appear to give it countenance. But what is the evidence on the other side? If we examine it, we shall find that the general strain of our Saviour's preaching was this, If ye would enter

into life, keep the commandments ; that all his Apostles, and even St. Paul himself declared, that without holiness no man can see the Lord ; and that these obscure texts, when they are compared with the whole of his writings, fairly admit of a different interpretation. To hesitate therefore between these two opinions, on account of the trifling objections which may be urged on one side, discovers a degree of irresolution and weakness of mind of which a Christian and rational man ought to be ashamed. If we determine not to assent to probable arguments, but to waver whilst a shadow of objection can be found, we shall either pass our lives without any religious opinions, or we shall continually wander from one opinion to another. That this is a pernicious state of mind no one can deny. For it must be acknowledged by all, that there is such a thing as truth, and that it is of importance to believe it. He who is irresolute in believing it, to make use of the comparison of the text, is like a wave of the sea, which is perpetually agitated and driven about by the winds.

The mischievous effects of irresolution in religion are most fully displayed in our refusing to admit, and neglecting to act upon, the consequences of our principles. We are chargeable with wavering, when we hesitate between old prejudices and what we now discern to be truth. We are afraid of taking any steps contrary to what we have been accus-  
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ed to, though our reason is convinced of their propriety. We hesitate and deliberate, even after we have obtained sufficient light on the subject ; and because our conduct would be new to ourselves, we delay to act. Does not this spirit of irresolution betray us into gross inconsistencies ? We believe, for instance, and are fully persuaded, that ceremonies do not constitute the essence of religion ; but we dare not say so, or conduct ourselves as if we thought so, lest it should afterwards turn out to be a falsehood. Let us, my brethren, act uniformly and steadily. Let us carefully inquire after truth ; but after we have found it, let us live conformably to it, and pursue it through all its consequences. We need not be afraid of doing so ; for a good cause must necessarily produce good effects, and truth, the best of all causes, can never lead to any thing which is evil. But if the consequences of our opinions appear injurious to piety or virtue, we ought not to be in haste to act upon them, we ought to apprehend that there is some defect in them, and we ought carefully to review them, and endeavour to find out where the fallacy lies.

II. I proceed, in the second place, to point out the mischievous effects of irresolution in our prudential conduct. The proper meaning of the word *prudence* is practical wisdom ; but when we speak of prudential conduct, we commonly intend those

actions, which are not absolutely either virtuous or vicious, but which are salutary or detrimental, according to the nature of them, and which may terminate either in virtue or vice. Good men are sometimes destitute of prudence, and, by their heedless conduct, they involve themselves in difficulties, from which they derive almost every species of misery, except remorse of conscience. This principle therefore is one, to which we ought strictly to attend ; and we ought carefully to inquire, not only what conduct is the most virtuous, but also what is the best, the wisest, and the most expedient for us, in the situation in which we are placed. In a word, we ought to propose to ourselves a prudential plan of life, not of what we think will be the most pleasant at the present moment, but what we judge will be the most beneficial in the end. There are many persons who have discernment and ability enough to form a plan ; but they fail in resolution in putting it in execution. They suffer the best concerted schemes to be defeated by the impulse of the moment, by passion, or by the too great ease of their tempers. Thus they continue during life to form resolutions, which they never execute except in part. From such irresolution great mischief results. Their systems may be wise ; but they are exposed to the same inconveniences, as if they acted without *any* system. They are unstable and uncertain in their conduct, and cannot depend on the operation of any

one of their schemes, because they have not sufficient resolution to carry them into effect.

From real life many examples can be produced, which show the truth of these remarks. I will mention two. The circumstances of a man may be such, that he is under the indispensable necessity of practising the strictest economy. He is sensible of it; and as he honestly wishes to do justice to his creditors and his family, he forms a plan, which, if adhered to, will, in a few years, retrieve his affairs, and enable him afterward to live with more freedom. But he suffers these wise resolutions to be defeated by invitations to parties of pleasure, by the fear of appearing parsimonious, by the desire of still keeping up some external splendour, and by other motives, which ought to have no influence upon a man of good sense. For what is the opinion of the world to a person, who cannot obtain the smallest relief from the companions of his pleasures, who would not respect him less for his frugality, and who perhaps even laugh at him for attempting to hide his poverty? At the end of the limited time, when he promised himself that he should be extricated from his difficulties, he finds himself still more embarrassed in his circumstances; and all this evil proceeds from the want of resolution.

Again, a man may be convinced that it is prudent to avoid the society of certain persons, not perhaps because they are not innocent, but because they do

him no good, because they are either too much below, or too much above him, or because he cannot persist in visiting them, without running the risk of impairing his honour, or from numberless other motives, of which he may feel the force, but which it is unnecessary for me particularly to enumerate. He resolves therefore to go no more ; but goes the next day. . He resolves again ; and again breaks his resolution. He binds himself by a solemn oath to keep his determination, observes it for a short time, but, in the end, violates his oath as well as his promises. I am describing here no unusual event. Such instances of irresolution take place every day ; and by such unstable determinations are men driven about, like the waves of the sea, when it is tossed by the wind.

III. I proceed, in the last place, to point out the mischievous effects of irresolution in our moral conduct. The duties of morality are obvious and certain. We cannot always determine what is true in speculation ; we are sometimes at a loss to determine what is the most prudent in conduct ; but we are in most cases able to ascertain what is pleasing to God, and conformable to the rule of right. Hence it is, that though men differ somewhat in their maxims of prudence, and still more in their religious opinions, yet they are in general agreed in their ideas of virtue and vice. They know what they ought to do,

and they determine to do what is right. But notwithstanding this knowledge, it is in our moral conduct that irresolution is most frequently displayed. The causes of it are manifest. They proceed from two principles in our constitution, which our Maker has been pleased to bestow upon us with wise and benevolent purposes. One of these principles is passion ; and the other, the power of habit. By passion we are impelled to avoid pain and pursue pleasure ; but as, by the violence of its emotions, it would lead us astray, God has given us reason, to restrain and direct it. By the power of habit are we enabled to acquire knowledge, to execute whatever we do with ease, and to obtain a uniformity of conduct, and a fixed and permanent character. If we were destitute of passion, we should be mere lifeless masses of matter, without energy in our conduct, without taste, without sympathy, without social affections, without devotion in our religion ; and if we were destitute of the power of habit, we could be certain of no acquisition whatever ; even a virtuous character itself would be insecure ; and a man, who had never committed a deed of wickedness, would be as liable to fall into vice, as he who had been corrupt. But these necessary principles, like every thing else in human nature, may be perverted from their original design. When reason is discarded, and passion is suffered to take the helm, as well as to fill the sails, we shall be agitated like the waves of the sea, and driven

far from our true course ; a corrupt habit will gradually be formed, and the bad man will find it as difficult to perform a virtuous action, as the good man does to commit a vicious action. It is when these corrupt habits prevail, and whilst they are beginning to prevail, that the fatal effects of irresolution are discovered. We resolve to be pious, to be holy, to repent of our sins, to lead new lives ; but vicious habits have obtained such a dominion over us, that it is extremely painful to execute our purposes. We resolve again, and bring nothing to pass. We determine to break off from a vicious practice, and never more to be guilty of it ; but in the moment of temptation, all our resolution forsakes us. In the mean time, our conscience pierces us with its sharp stings. The fancied pleasure which we pursued is gone, and nothing is left but anguish of mind. We again resolve ; and pray to God most fervently, that he would strengthen our resolution. We say, The evil may yet be repaired : Surely I have vigour of soul enough to preserve myself from destruction. But passion suddenly seizes the reins : We combat awhile with feeble opposition : We feel ourselves sinking : We lift up our eyes to heaven, afraid to ask, because we know that we do not deserve assistance : We yield, and a faint uneasiness only remains : Passion subsides, and we once more awake to the consciousness of our misery and guilt. Thus we go on resolving, and breaking our resolves,



confirming by every fresh crime our corrupt habits, and rendering it more and more difficult to keep our resolutions. At length we conclude from our melancholy experience, that it is impossible to conquer our passions ; we give up the attempt in despair ; and abandon ourselves to the torrent of vice.

The deplorable effects of this irresolution should teach us to resist evil in the beginning. We should not suffer bad habits to become confirmed ; but restrain our passions, whilst they are capable of being restrained. We should combat the spirit of irresolution, with the conviction that it gives strength to vice, and that the more frequently we break our resolutions, the harder it is to keep them. But should we be deeply plunged in wickedness, shall we not attempt to extricate ourselves ? Shall we resign ourselves to despair, and die in a state of guilt, because it requires courage to be virtuous ? If we value either our present or future happiness, let us rouse ourselves. Vicious habits are hard to be subdued ; but they are not invincible. Many instances can be produced of abandoned sinners, who have reformed, and who have become afterward patterns of virtue. Let these examples encourage us, and inspire us with emulation. Let us once more resolve to change our conduct ; and let us fortify our minds with every motive, which will induce us to keep our resolutions. In particular, whilst we recollect our frequent relapses, let us flee from temp-

tation. The most usual cause of the irresolution of sinners is, that they do not cautiously avoid the situations, where their virtue is in danger. Our passions, when the objects of them are out of sight, are not so apt to be inflamed. Let us banish ourselves from them ; which we can do, if we please. If we choose, we can abstain from the society of the wicked, and from almost every other temptation, by which we may be seduced.

Human life is a state of warfare ; but it is a state of warfare to them only, who are rendered irresolute by the long practice of vice : It is a state of peace to them, who are experienced in the way of salvation. Should it however be as difficult, as it is sometimes represented, to attain to innocency, are not the rewards, with which God has promised to crown it, sufficient to counterbalance the difficulty ? Should a life of virtue be a life of pain, at the worst, it can last only a few years ; and it will be succeeded by immortal happiness. Let this motive animate us to persevere ; let it render us resolute and courageous : Our race is short ; but the prize is eternal. In fine, my beloved brethren, let us be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

2d S. in Lent.

# SERMON XV.

THE EXTENT OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.


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PSALM ii. 8.

I WILL GIVE THEE THE HEATHEN FOR THINE INHERITANCE,  
AND THE UTTERMOST PARTS OF THE EARTH FOR THY POSSESSION.

OUR Saviour, Jesus Christ, appeared among men, that he might establish a kingdom of righteousness and peace, which should last as long as the world lasts, and become more extensive, than any other that had ever been erected on earth. We have reason therefore to rejoice and give thanks to God at the commencement of his happy reign ; for on this day he is declared to be Son of God with power, according to the holy spirit, by his resurrection from the dead.

There are a few Christians, who maintain, that the Psalm, from which I have taken the text, was composed by David for his son Solomon, and that it exclusively applies to that celebrated monarch. They explain it by a reference to the promises, which were made by God to the posterity of Abra-



him, and in which it was foretold, that the Israelites should subdue the heathen, and extend their dominion from the Red sea to the Mediterranean, and from the deserts of Arabia to the river Euphrates. These promises, they add, were not fully accomplished, till the reign of Solomon; but of him we read in the first book of Kings, that he reigned over all kingdoms, from the river (meaning the Euphrates) unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt.

As the second Psalm however is several times quoted in the New Testament, and applied to Jesus Christ, and as it has been understood by Jewish interpreters to be a prophecy of the Messiah, the text is by Christians in general referred to another, and more glorious son of David than Solomon, to a son, who appeared after the lapse of ten centuries. To his person and character, it is alleged, the language of the Psalmist is more strictly applicable. Of him it may with truth be said, that the heathen are given to him for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. There are in the sacred Scriptures many plain passages, which in their primitive meaning foretell that the kingdom of Christ will be extended over a large portion of the earth. To this head may be referred many predictions of the ancient prophets. In the New Testament the clearest intimations are given, that the kingdom of Christ will in time become very exten-

sive. This appears to be the just interpretation of several parables of the gospel ; and we are expressly assured by our Saviour, that even before the destruction of Jerusalem, the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world ; by which he probably intended the whole extent of the Roman empire.

By these and other predictions a general expectation has been excited in the breasts of Christians, that the kingdom of the Messiah will continue to spread, and will become more and more extensive, till at last it will comprehend every part of the habitable earth. The extent of Christ's kingdom is the subject of the present discourse. I will, first, show, in a few words, what progress has hitherto been made in establishing this kingdom ; and, secondly, what accessions it may be expected to receive in future ages.

I. It appears from ecclesiastical history, and from ancient heathen testimony, that, as our Saviour had predicted, the gospel, before the close of the first century, was preached in every country, where the Roman power prevailed. It thence by degrees extended its influence among many of the surrounding independent nations. In the fourth century, it gained a complete triumph over paganism, and became the established religion of the state. As the Roman empire declined, it subdued the barbarous

nations which broke that colossal power : so that, before the end of the sixth century, it flourished on all the shores of the Mediterranean, had reached Ethiopia, had penetrated deeply into Asia, and into the middle regions of Europe.

In the following century, the kingdom of Christ was abridged by Mahomet and his followers ; but whilst it lost ground in Asia and Africa it continued to make progress in Poland, Russia, and Scandinavia ; so that in the thirteenth century it was the established religion of every part of Europe, except the countries, which had submitted to the Mahometan arms. Thus were the kingdoms of this world, according to the prediction of St. John, and probably in the sense in which he understood it, made the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ.

At the revival of learning, and in consequence of the spirit of enterprise which it introduced, countries before unknown were laid open to the knowledge of the Europeans. The love of power and the love of gain carried men into the remotest parts of the earth ; but whilst their hearts festered with ambition and avarice, they boasted that they were erecting the kingdom of Christ. Attempts were made to christianize the newly discovered nations ; and the gospel was preached on the shores of Africa, in India and China, and in many of the regions of America. But its triumphs no longer resembled the conquests of the primitive ages : for it was for

the most part proclaimed by heralds, who were not worthy to bear the heavenly tidings ; or it was announced to savages, who were so deeply sunk in ignorance and barbarism, that they were not qualified for its reception. On the whole however the kingdom of Christ has been advanced since the revival of learning ; converts have been made ; and the number of Christians, by the increase of the nations, who are the subjects of the Messiah, has been greatly augmented.

II. I proceed, secondly, to consider what accessions the kingdom of Christ may be expected to receive in future ages.

Europe is a well-settled country ; but it is still capable, particularly in Spain and Russia, of affording a subsistence to many additional inhabitants. If the nations of that important quarter of the globe could be persuaded to suspend for fifty years their sanguinary wars, which have laid waste so many of their fertile fields, and overwhelmed so many of their flourishing cities, the destruction of human life would be diminished, and the population, as well as the happiness, of those countries would be vastly increased. Will not nations, who call themselves Christians, in time be mindful of the principles of their peaceable religion ? Will not they, who have gone so far, as to abolish the African slave trade, be willing to go one step farther, and to abolish

war? The hopes of peacemakers, who pray for the enlargement of the kingdom of the Messiah, have so often been disappointed, that they should not be too sanguine in their expectations : but during the last three centuries, so much has been done in favour of the rights and happiness of man ; the Christian religion is so much better understood, and, we may venture to say, its benevolent precepts are so much more frequently practised ; and the inhabitants of Europe are so much more numerous, than they were in the dark and barbarous ages ; that there is no presumption in anticipating, that their progress toward perfection will not be arrested ; and that each new century will see the addition of a large and faithful body of subjects to the kingdom of Christ.

In the mean time the Mahometan power which has long oppressed the countries, where the gospel was first propagated, is apparently declining ; and a revolution, which would cause Christianity to become again the predominant religion in Greece, Asia Minor, and Syria, would not be unexpected, or exceed in wonder several others, which have lately taken place in the world. Those delightful regions want nothing but the restoration of the kingdom of peace, to render them as populous and as prosperous, as they were in ancient times.

As to America, there is one part of the prospect, which is discouraging. The attempt, which



has been made to introduce its savage inhabitants into the kingdom of the Messiah, has been attended with so little success, that sober and experienced men are now ready to abandon it in despair. Not that many of the natives have not become Christians ; but the melancholy fact is, that it has been found impracticable to preserve or continue the race. Like the wild beasts of the forests, they have disappeared at the approach of the civilized man ; and they have been, during so long a time, and in so many places, wasting away, that it appears to be by an established law of divine Providence ; and no person, who possesses a knowledge of their manners and history, has now a doubt, that they will soon cease to be a people. But this expectation, gloomy as it may be at the first view, is more adverse to the extension of the kingdom of Christ in semblance, than in reality. The red man disappears, but the white man takes his place ; and where ten of the former roamed, a thousand of the latter dwell in secure habitations. This way of enlarging the dominion of the Messiah was not anticipated by the Christians of former times. But God does not always effect his purposes by the means, which men would prescribe : when however we have seen the event, we are convinced, that it is by better means. Who now can doubt, that this vast continent, filled with civilized Christians, affords a more glorious spectacle in the sight of Heaven,

than a few churches of savages, scattered over the land, at immeasurable distances from each other?—America seems destined to become the largest division of the kingdom of Christ. If the causes, which have hitherto multiplied its population, should continue to operate, at the end of a few centuries it will contain, in its two continents, above a thousand million of white inhabitants, all of whom will call themselves the subjects of Jesus. Whilst the uttermost parts of the earth are thus given to him for his possession, though we lament the melancholy fate of the original inhabitants of America, we should not be surprised, that the Author of nature is producing his important ends, not by supernatural, not even by extraordinary, means, but by the operation of second causes, and in the usual course of his divine administrations.

In several parts of Asia and Africa zealous missionaries are now attempting to diffuse the knowledge of the gospel; but the success, except in the islands of the Pacifick ocean, does not appear to be great, nor to correspond with the exertions of the Christians, who conduct the work. Every good man, however, must applaud the benevolence and piety, by which they are actuated; and every candid man must approve the pains, which they have taken to communicate the Scriptures to the inhabitants in their own languages. Possibly the experiment may fail at last; but it ought not to be aban-

doned, till after a trial has been made during a number of years, nor till it is found to be absolutely hopeless.

If the Divine Being should not see fit to add these parts of the earth to the dominion of his Son, the believer may console his mind with the prospect, that a new field will probably be opened for the triumphs of the kingdom of Christ. On the southeast of Asia lies a continent, in a temperate climate, accommodated to the habits of civilized man. It is already begun to be settled by Europeans; and judging from past events, we may conclude, that in a few centuries, it will contain many millions of Christian inhabitants.

Such are the accessions, which, without having recourse to the supposition of any thing supernatural, the kingdom of Christ may be expected to receive in future ages. God may make use of other natural instruments, which are at present unforeseen by us, as the means which I have pointed out were by our ancestors. But whatever they may be, there is no cause to apprehend, that the dominion of the Messiah is declining; on the contrary, there are many reasons for hoping, that it will become every day more firm and extensive. That it will finally be a universal dominion, a kingdom which will embrace the whole earth, is what many Christians believe; and it is thought by them that the prophecies of the Scriptures foretell this event. If this

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opinion, however, embarrasses them in their defence of the gospel against the objections of infidels, they are not obliged to take it for granted. The sacred writers were accustomed to express their ideas with so much strength, that sometimes more met the ear, than was meant to be conveyed to the mind. An instance of this hyperbolical style we have in the seventy-second Psalm, the language of which, however forcible may be its sound, was primarily fulfilled, and was intended to be fulfilled, in the person of Solomon. If hereafter the kingdom of Christ should be found to be universal, the prophecies of the Scriptures may be justly applied to the event; for they admit, though they do not necessarily demand, that explanation: but in the mean while it will be sufficient for the defender of Christianity to show, that our Saviour promised that his dominion should be extensive, and that it has become so in effect.

That it may be farther enlarged, is the prayer of the benevolent man; because wherever it is established, it diffuses blessings on its subjects. Let us therefore endeavour to increase their number by every means in our power. Whenever an opportunity presents itself of sending the gospel to distant nations, or of converting a heathen from the errors of idolatry to the worship of one God, let us embrace it with zeal. But if no such opportunity of-

fers, we need not lament, that we are deprived of the power of doing good ; because there are many ways nearer home, in which, with less expense, and with more effect, we can manifest our piety and benevolence. Every exertion, which we make to render religion more intelligible, or to communicate the knowledge of it to them, who are ignorant or unmindful of its salutary truths, contributes to the enlargement of the kingdom of Christ. In particular may we add to the number of his subjects, when we have the will and the power to promote the ease, prosperity, and virtue of our country ; so that, a subsistence being readily obtained, and the lives of the people being not wantonly destroyed by vice, new Christian inhabitants appear throughout the land, and new Christian cities, villages, and churches are every where built.

In effecting this important purpose, it is the duty of all good men to unite their endeavours to remove the causes, which tend to desolate the country, to abridge or destroy the lives of the inhabitants, and to fill their houses with poverty and misery. The two causes, which most frequently have a deadly operation on the happiness and increase of nations, and which consequently prevent the growth of the kingdom of Christ, are intemperance and war.

There cannot be a doubt, that from intemperance proceeds no small part of the wretchedness, which

is endured among us. It is time to put a more effectual check on the deleterious vice, than has hitherto been done,—by combinations of masters to withhold the intoxicating draught from their hired servants,—by suppressing the dens of sin, where the poison is sold in small quantities to the idle and dissolute,—by laws of the government, which will increase the price of ardent spirits,—and by continuing the moral and religious exhortations, which have already produced salutary effects.

War is at present removed from our country ; and whilst we are enjoying the blessings of peace, we may be allowed to lift up our voices against it, and to pronounce, that war is of all follies, into which man has fallen, the most absurd, and of all crimes the most destructive of human life and happiness. At the close of the hostilities of the revolution, by which our country was emancipated from the power of the parent state, this sentiment prevailed in the breasts of many of the wise and the good ; and arguments were then urged against war, and some attempts were made to put an end to it forever. With what success this was done, is well known to all who are acquainted with the history of the protracted war, introduced by the French revolution. During that period, the hands of men were more deeply imbrued in blood, than perhaps in any former age of the world. But let not the Christian

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## SERMON XVI.

FEAR OF PUNISHMENT.

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HOSEA xiii. 9.

THOU HAST DESTROYED THYSELF.

THE Supreme Being, who is infinitely good, as well as infinitely wise and powerful, in creating the children of men, designed them for virtue and happiness. Virtue is valuable for its own sake : it is an object, which we cannot forbear to love and admire, even if it should produce no salutary effects to the individual, by whom it is practised. The good man is a great and honourable character, whether he is happy or unhappy ; and a world filled with virtuous beings is a glorious spectacle, whatever the consequences of their virtue may be. But the value of virtue is much enhanced, when it is found that the natural effect of it is to bless its possessors. God intends us for perfect moral rectitude, because the consequence of it is happiness ; and he forbids whatever is contrary to it, because by transgressing its laws, we render ourselves miserable.

In this view of virtue, as the cause of happiness, we cannot forbear considering every method, which God employs to lead us to it, as an instance of benevolence. When he says to us, Be ye holy, it is the same thing as if he said to us in other words, Be ye happy. With how many means of felicity of various kinds has he provided us ! In the natural world we see and acknowledge the goodness of God. Here one part is adjusted to another, and the happiness of mankind is designed in all. The earth and the vegetables which spring from it, the rain and the clear shining of the sun, the sea and the air, have each a final cause, which is some good to created beings. It is the same thing in the moral world. When God instructs us in his will by the objects, that he presents to our view ; imprints on our bosoms a love of whatsoever things are true, honourable, just, pure, kind, and praiseworthy ; and gives us reason, by which we are enabled to ascertain the nature of actions, and the difference between virtue and vice ; his intention is to lead us to happiness. Above all, his supernatural communications are designed to promote this object. He has sent his Son to bless mankind, by turning them away from their iniquities. For this purpose did Jesus Christ and his Apostles describe piety and holiness in all their charms. For this purpose did they declare, that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things,

which God hath prepared for them who love him. The design of all our Saviour's precepts was to give rest to our souls ; to communicate to us peace, and comfort, and joy in the holy Spirit. In a word, all the commands and all the promises of God respect this end.

But God employs other means and motives to lead us to virtue, which are his threatenings, or denunciations of punishment, to be inflicted on the sinful. These threatenings seem to present his character in another view, as a severe and angry Being : this sentiment however is founded on our misconceptions. For what is implied in the threatenings of the Deity ? Do they proceed from any real severity in his nature ? No ; for he is eternally and unchangeably benevolent : he delights not in the misery, but in the happiness of his creatures. Do they imply that God will punish for the sake of punishing ? No ; but all his threats amount to these prohibitions : Destroy not yourselves : do yourselves no harm : do not injure and ruin yourselves by your crimes : do not make yourselves wretched. They are not merely denunciations of positive punishment ; but they may also be regarded as declarations of the natural and inevitable consequences of sin.

If it is admitted as an established truth, that the purpose of the Almighty in creating man was to

confer happiness on him, it must at the same time be allowed, that a particular constitution of mind is necessary to qualify him for this happiness. This constitution in man appears to be holy dispositions and confirmed habits of virtue. It is evident, that as the possession of these qualities produces felicity, so what is contrary to them must produce misery. For opposite causes must of necessity yield opposite effects ; and to assert, that man might have been made happy both by obedience and disobedience to the commands of God, is as absurd as to say, that a body, which is impelled in a certain direction by an external force, may at the same time be impelled toward the same point by a force applied in a contrary direction. This argument is conclusive ; and thus do different causes act throughout nature. If fire warms, cold must chill us ; if virtue makes us happy, vice must render us miserable.

It is in our power to choose either of these causes, either virtue or vice ; in other words, we are free agents. Life and death are set before us ; and we are able to make an election between them. Consequently our happiness and misery are of our own procuring. If we choose to be happy, happiness is within our reach, and nothing can frustrate our design : if we choose to be miserable, nothing can prevent our pernicious choice ; and when we become so, we can blame none but ourselves.

If this reasoning is just, when God forbids us to commit sin, and threatens us with punishment, if we disregard his prohibition, we may consider him as speaking to us in the following manner :—

Children of men, moved by the principle of benevolence, I have created you and placed you on the earth. I have made you to be happy, and not to promote my own felicity. Your goodness extends not to me ; it is no pleasure nor gain to me, if you are righteous : for infinitely blessed in myself, I stand in no need of your services and praises. I have formed you free, capable of choosing either virtue or vice. Virtue is the source of genuine felicity ; and without freedom virtue can have no existence : for the essence of it consists in voluntarily preferring what is right, when it is in your power to practise what is wrong. I command you therefore to be virtuous, because I desire your happiness. I promise you that you shall be blessed, if you obey my will : or I make known to you the natural consequences of obedience. I enjoin it upon you to do yourselves good : I direct you to make yourselves happy here and hereafter. On the contrary I forbid you to sin, because I desire not your death and misery. I threaten you with punishment, if you disobey my will : or I reveal to you the natural consequences of disobedience. I command you not to destroy yourselves : I forbid you to make yourselves wretched in this world and in the other.

In this view of the threatenings of God, they appear to be proofs of his love no less than his promises. It is true that they distress the mind of the sinner ; but this present distress is designed to prevent still greater misery. They are the chastisements of a father, inflicted on his children ; they are the salutary warnings of a benevolent parent. He who complains that his heavenly Father is severe, when he threatens him, is like a man, who complains of a friend for warning him not to venture himself on a sea, which is filled with sunken rocks, and on which every vessel that attempts to pass is shipwrecked : Suffer me to proceed : distress not my mind with frightful apprehensions. The breeze is fresh and balmy ; and yonder verdant and beautiful island invites my approach. Let me spread my sail. Acquaint me not with my destruction, till I feel its first inevitable shock ; but permit me, if so it must be, to dash my frail bark in pieces on the rocks below. Similar language is used by the sinner, who is unwilling to be threatened : Terrify me not with denunciations of misery : tell me not of the consequences of vice. I expect to find gratification in the indulgence of my appetites ; and let me enjoy without gloomy forebodings the pleasure, which they afford. Punishment may possibly come at last ; but when it actually arrives, it will then be time enough to feel its pangs.

How foolish is the language of both these persons ! If the man was impelled to cross the dangerous sea, or the sinner to commit iniquity, by necessity which cannot be counteracted, it might perhaps be wise ; for it is prudent to avoid, not only pain, but the anticipation of pain, when it produces no future good effects. To both these madmen, however, the reply may be made : I mean not, by warning you of your approaching danger, merely to distress your mind ; but to do you good, to prevent the evil, which you have power to shun. Pleasant as it may appear in the deceptive light of temptation, misery and destruction are in the way, which you are pursuing ; and if you persist in it, you will soon find it to be so by fatal experience. I only warn you not to destroy yourself ; not to bring on yourself the ruin, which you can escape, if you choose.

There are sinners however, who are not satisfied with this reply. They think that God has power to prevent the evil consequences of sin ; that he ought to prevent them, if he is infinitely good ; and that though virtue naturally produces happiness, yet that vice ought to produce it too, or, at least, not misery. To what does this presumptuous language amount ? It amounts to this, that God has power, and that he ought to violate the laws, which he has established for the government of the world ; that he ought to destroy all connexion between cause

and effect ; that he ought to make a state of health to consist in the soundness and regularity of the several parts of the human body, whilst at the same time health is equally preserved by a want of soundness and a total irregularity ; that he ought to make happiness to arise from mental harmony, whilst at the same time it is equally produced by mental discord ; in a word, that he ought to effect contradictions and impossibilities.

If the system of divine Providence, in which sin is followed by evil consequences, really exists, it is not absolutely necessary, that we should be able to account for it, or give a reason why it is established. If we should even have in our minds plausible objections against it, they are of little importance ; because what is perceived to be true in fact, must remain so, notwithstanding all the difficulties, which may attend our conception of this truth. Or, to express myself in other terms, on the supposition that a system, in which fear and punishment have a place, cannot be fully reconciled with our notions of the goodness of God, and that we can form in our imaginations a more simple and perfect plan, nevertheless every rational man will submit to the truth of things ; because he perceives, if he acts in opposition to them, that his theories, however well contrived and apparently consistent, only mislead him. If we should admit therefore, that it is in the power of the Deity, acting as a moral gov-



ernour, to prevent the evil consequences of sin, the inquiry may still be made, does he do it in fact? Ought our conduct to be regulated by what may be, and by what we suppose God might do, or ought to do? Ought it not, on the contrary, to be directed by what is, by what we find that God has done, and believe that he will do? Do we not every day observe in other men, or experience in ourselves, that sin is punished, or that it produces evil consequences? If this punishment is wrong, the constitution of nature is wrong; but can it be altered by us? If he who sins, injures himself, destroys himself, renders himself miserable, is it not right, is it not benevolent, to warn him not to persist in his wickedness, and not to injure himself any more?

This act of benevolence is displayed by our heavenly Father in his prohibitions. When for example, he forbids the sin of avarice, his design is to prevent the man, who admits it into his bosom, from extinguishing the kind affections, which are the source of so much satisfaction; and from oppressing his heart with the heavy burden of anxiety: it is because the immoderate pursuit of wealth is not only productive of selfishness and other vices, but also because it deprives him of many comforts, which he voluntarily denies himself, and exposes him to the contempt which his meanness deserves.

Again, when God forbids impiety, it is because it takes a man out of the protection of his Maker, and

robs him of the pleasure, which a consciousness of the divine approbation affords. It is not only because the love of God is a duty, which he owes to an infinitely benevolent Being, but likewise because it is the most effectual motive to virtue, the surest preservative against temptation, the best consolation in affliction. It is because irreligion is dark and gloomy, and destroys every sentiment, which ennobles the heart.

The same observation may be made on every other sin : God prohibits them, not only because they are hateful in themselves, but also because they destroy us. That they injure us in this world is generally allowed : the same evil consequences, however, must continue, whilst we persist in them, in whatever world we exist. Few will deny, that in the Scriptures future punishment is threatened to the wicked ; and the reason of man cannot object aught against it, if it is properly understood. Some Christians conceive it to be altogether of a positive kind ; but there is another light, in which it may be viewed : it is the natural and inevitable consequence of sin ; and God, in threatening the wicked, may be said to reveal to them what this consequence is. So that all the denunciations of wrath to come, which the sacred writers express in such awful terms, may amount to this prohibition : Destroy not yourselves : do not by your present conduct prepare for yourselves tribulation in the other world.

If the Scriptures were simply to make known to us, that there is a future state, without saying a word of any punishment in it, this information ought to be sufficient to alarm the wicked. For as virtue only can make us happy, and vice inevitably renders us miserable, in whatever place we exist,—unless we suppose, that on entering this new state, a sinner will be immediately and supernaturally changed, which is not a probable supposition,—he must infallibly continue wretched, till his vitious habits are corrected, and his moral character reformed.

As God is the author of every thing which exists, the evil consequences of sin were established by him. The view, therefore, which we have thus taken of his threatenings and punishments, is not inconsistent with the common system, that they are positive denunciations and positive inflictions ; nor does the language, which we have used, contradict the language employed by others. We say with them, that God threatens the wicked with punishment, and inflicts it, when they do not reform. It is the general opinion of Christians, with whom we coincide, that man is a being, in whose soul fear, as well as hope, has a place ; and that it is proper to address his fear in order to preserve him from sin, or to reclaim him to holiness. There are Christians, who deny the truth of this opinion, and who assert, that fear ought not to be made a religious principle. As

connected with this assertion, they maintain that punishment has no tendency to reform them, who suffer it ; on the contrary, that it drives men to despair ; that it is nothing but mercy, which can touch the human heart ; and that gratitude is the only motive, which can produce actions essentially good. There is something so pleasing in this system, and so flattering to human nature, that many persons adopt it, as soon as it is proposed.

The system however, like many other ingenious hypotheses, is inconsistent with fact and the sacred Scriptures. In the Scriptures, the Almighty, is so far from following the rules, which some men would prescribe to him, that he has threatened, as well as promised ; there are denunciations of wrath, as well as offers of mercy : and if we attend to facts, we perceive, that crimes are accompanied with forebodings of pain ; and that, when they are committed, pain is actually inflicted ; by which punishment many sinners are deterred from committing such crimes in future.

There are religious systems, which degrade and vilify mankind ; but the system, that God governs his subjects entirely by exciting hope and gratitude, goes into the other extreme, and exalts the species too highly. The truth is, that men are a noble order of beings ; but they are not so noble, as to be superiour to the influence of fear. Motives perfectly refined are above the comprehension of many :

in numerous respects they resemble children ; and like them, when they stray, they must sometimes be chastised again into good behaviour. Thus have the wisest of men thought and written. Thus in particular have the authors of the sacred books conceived. Thus did God deal in ancient times with his peculiar people, the Jews : when they disobeyed his laws, he visited them with famine, pestilence, the sword, and captivity. Thus does he still deal with the world : in his dispensations with mankind, there are fear and punishment, as well as hope and reward.

Do not fear and punishment produce good effects? do they not restrain men from committing sin? Can it be denied, that many are kept within the bounds of temperance and chastity by the apprehension of the wretchedness and degradation, which follow an indulgence in the contrary vices? Does not the fear of censure preserve many from rash speeches, and that imprudence of behaviour, which sports on the brink of vice? Can it be denied, that the penalties inflicted by courts of justice terrify multitudes, and prevent them from becoming thieves, when otherwise they would not be scrupulous in making a free use of the property of their neighbour? Bad as some men are, would they not be worse, if they believed that they could commit crimes with impunity, and if all fear of punishment was removed from their minds? If these causes

then operate thus effectually with respect to the present world, why should they not operate with respect to the other world? If men are made honest, discreet, temperate, and chaste, by these motives, why should they not by them be deterred from profaneness and impiety? If God has declared, that nothing, which defileth, can enter the heavenly city, may not men be rationally influenced by the declaration to avoid the sins, which would corrupt their souls?

In answer to these questions, I am sensible, that it may be objected, that motives of this kind cannot change the heart, and that their utmost effect will be to produce actions externally decent; that although such actions may be useful to society, and may be valuable in the eyes of the world, yet that they are mere hypocrisy, and can never be pleasing to God; because he looketh not on the outward appearance, but on the heart; and hath respect, not to the deed itself, but to the principle from which it flows.

The reply to this objection will, I conceive, throw light on the subject, and determine what influence the fear of punishment has in religion. The chief design of threatenings, which excite such fear, appears to be to awaken attention, and to lead men to serious reflection. When by the practice of vice they have deadened their moral feelings, are not

touched by generous motives, and have become deaf to the gentle calls of Heaven, the sound of thunder assails their ears. As they cannot be persuaded to abandon the paths of destruction, they must be snatched from them with violence. Infatuated by temptation, they wish to persevere in sin ; and they even lament that it is not always attended with joy. But the terrible consequences of sin are, by a divine threatening, displayed in such vivid colours, that they perceive it would be destructive to commit it any longer. They turn back with reluctance. With aversion they enter the confines of virtue. They view her as a severe mistress ; and hope, that it will once more be in their power to indulge their guilty passions. But as they proceed, they find that temptation had given them a false representation of virtue ; and they see that her ways are pleasant, and her paths tranquil. Vice, as they retire farther from her tyrannical dominion, becomes in their sight, at first less desirable, and at last detestable. The just Being, who, in consequence of his denunciations of punishment, appeared to them, whilst they were in misty regions of sin, as a hard master, is, by the pure and heavenly light, which they now enjoy, contemplated as an indulgent parent ; and though they entered into the course of religion from what has been termed a servile principle of fear, yet they soon learn to persist in it from higher motives.

An attention to the power of habit will confirm the truth of this representation. Habits are of two kinds, bad and good. Bad habits become every day more inveterate, and more difficult to be removed; but time is so far from rendering them agreeable; that he, who is subjected to their tyranny, is continually plunging himself more deeply in wretchedness. Good habits have a contrary effect; for it is evident, that by means of this part of human nature, actions which were at first laborious, and even disgusting, provided they are good and useful, become in time tolerable, and at last pleasant. We daily observe instances of men, who began a course of life, which was irksome to them, and who are now, by long use, not only reconciled, but warmly attached to it. If this effect follows the continued practice of other good things, it is in particular the result of the practice of religion; of which we may with truth affirm, that it becomes more and more easy, constant, and delightful by habit, whether a man is led to it at first by force or persuasion.

It is evident, from the observations which have been made, that fear of punishment alone will not be sufficient to guide us through the whole course of virtue. No; it is necessary that other motives should step in to its assistance; if we would become complete in holiness, it is necessary that we should feel the influence of love and gratitude. But a man, who enters on the practice of religion.



by whatever just cause he may be first brought into it, will find other motives springing up and increasing in his heart. When he learns by experience, that the denunciations of wrath, which at first appeared to him to proceed from harshness, were in reality produced by mercy, affection toward his heavenly Father will arise in him. This affection will by degrees increase in his soul ; till at length, having obtained entire possession of it, perfect love will cast out fear. In a word, the fear of punishment cannot be deemed a complete instructor in religion ; but it may be justly considered in the same view, in which St. Paul exhibits the law of Moses, as a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.

Thus it appears that the fear of punishment is adapted to reform men ; and that the Supreme Being is wise and merciful in displaying his terrors, as well as his mercies, to their view. The same observation may be made on punishment itself ; for the arguments which have been alleged, apply as forcibly, and even with more strength, to punishment, than to the fear of punishment : because if only an apprehension of evil is sufficient to induce the wicked to forsake their sins, the actual suffering of evil must more effectually answer the purpose. To render this argument conclusive, we must, I confess, suppose, that as God does not threaten sinners, merely to terrify them, so neither does he punish them for the sake of punishment. The

Scriptures however justify us in making this supposition : for both in the Old and in the New Testament it is declared, that whom the Lord loveth he correcteth ; even as a father, the son in whom he delighteth. It is evident that punishment is often, if not generally, disciplinary, and is intended for the benefit of him, by whom it is endured : and it is probable, that whilst the sinner retains his free agency, and till he has acquired such an inveterate habit of wickedness, that it is morally impossible to reform him, it must be in his power to repent and to return to God.

The conclusion from the subject is, that our heavenly Father has in mercy excited our fear, by threatening us with punishment, or by making known to us the consequences of sin, in the present, and in the future state. It follows therefore, that he is not less benevolent, and not less an object of love, when he arrays himself with terrour, than when he publishes good tidings of great joy. In all his dispensations he is infinitely good. He is good, when he promises, he is good, when he rewards us ; he is good, when he threatens, he is good, when he punishes us. His character is uniform ; it appears amiable and adorable in every view ; and it should influence us to fear and serve him with reverence and grateful devotion.

2d S. after Easter.

## SERMON XVII.

### CONTENT.

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#### PSALMS **xxiii.** 1, 2.

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT. HE  
MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN PASTURES OF TENDER  
GRASS; HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE WATERS OF QUIET-  
NESS.

In this passage, which I have read as it is translated in the margin of our English Bible, we have a pleasing picture of a life of content.—By content I mean a moderate degree of happiness, that happiness, which leaves the mind satisfied without producing rapture: where under the protection of God, the kind shepherd, there is no want of any necessary comfort; but we are led to repose on pastures of tender grass, and drink the healthful waters of a brook, which flows quietly at our feet. This content is in general all, which we can expect to obtain in the present world. We may esteem ourselves favoured, if we can pass along without having cause to complain. If our minds are gently stirred with pleasant emotions, it is all that we can

hope, and all that we ought to desire ; for on earth there are few causes of extatick pleasure. Sometimes perhaps the man of taste may feel it, on the view of an exquisite production of art or the imagination ; but this sensation passes away in a moment ; and it is seldom excited more than once by the same object.

In pursuit of the high degrees of happiness, we are commonly disappointed ; and we not only miss the pleasure, which we aimed at, but we find that mortification has taken its place. We should learn then to moderate our desires, and to be satisfied with lower degrees of happiness, which will compensate us for their want of intenseness by their duration.

It is in a great measure in our power to acquire such a satisfaction as I have now described ; but for this purpose it is necessary to observe rules of conduct ; for content comes not of itself unsolicited. The gifts of God are bestowed on the meritorious, who are awake, and whose minds are active : they descend not on the idle, who do not seek them ; on the vicious, who are unfit for their reception. I purpose in this discourse to offer several rules, by means of which we may hope to obtain a contented mind.

I would previously observe, that there are circumstances and times, in which, though we may be

virtuous, it is impossible to be contented. I am not so visionary as to suppose, that any one can be happy, when his body is in pain, when he has suffered an aggravated loss, or experienced a deep mortification. We may, through the influence of religion, be enabled to bear these evils with patience ; and consequently may in some degree lessen them : but after all they do not cease to be evils. They may eventually do us good ; but they are now a bitter cup, which we drink with disgust, and from which we may hope to be delivered.—In particular, I do not suppose, that they who have passed the former part of life in a vitious, or even in an imprudent, manner, can expect to enjoy a large share of content. They may sincerely repent of their follies and crimes ; but repentance, though it obtains forgiveness from God, cannot reverse the laws of nature which he has constituted. He who rashly cuts off one of his hands, may soon be sorry for his folly ; but his sorrow, however sincere and lasting, cannot make him whole. Repentance cannot restore the inheritance, which has been prodigally dissipated ; or the health, which has been wantonly impaired. It cannot remove the pain, which has already been given ; or prevent the scandal, which has already been occasioned. However pious and virtuous a man may be at present, if his conscience compels him to look back on past deeds of vice and impiety, he must necessarily feel the mortification of self-re-

proach. Perfect content therefore cannot be the portion of them, who have not maintained an uninterrupted course of innocence. In the other world, we hope, the consequences of sin will be completely obliterated ; but in the present state it is always punished.

1. This observation shows the importance of beginning life in a proper manner. Accordingly the first rule, which I would give you, my brethren, for the attainment of a contented mind, is, that you should in youth pursue those objects, which are best adapted to its production. It is well known, that no man can enjoy content, who has lost his health ; who is involved in debt ; who is deprived of his good name ; who is compelled to associate himself with the low and infamous part of society ; who has no self-command, and is the slave of imperious habits. I say then, if you wish to secure a contented mind, you should in youth avoid the causes, which produce these fatal effects. You should be temperate in the use of pleasure, that you may preserve the vigour of your constitution ; for health is a blessing, which is necessary to give a relish to all other enjoyments. You should endeavour to store your minds with knowledge ; that when external objects fail, you may possess a fund of entertainment in yourselves. By cautious and upright conduct you should maintain a fair reputa-

tion ; and by meekness, candour, and benevolence, you should merit the esteem of your fellow men, and gain their confidence. You should, in particular, look forward to manhood and old age ; and not by an immoderate indulgence, exhaust those sources of satisfaction, which, temperately used, would last through life. In a word, if you desire to obtain content, you must be good in your youth. To this point the exhortations of preachers, on this, and on every other subject, tend. Whatever may be our theme, and however large a field of remark we may undertake to pass over, this is the centre, to which we are brought at last : for goodness, or virtue, or holiness, or, as Solomon expresses it, the fear of God and the keeping of his commandments, —is the whole duty, business, and happiness of man.

2. It is expedient to be more particular : I therefore give as a second rule, or observation, that constant industry is one of the most abundant sources of content. Industry at first view has a severe and forbidding aspect : for every man, not only wishes for rest and ease, but it is generally the object of his labours. He hopes, after all his toils, to repose at last ; to retire from noise and tumult ; and in the company of a few select friends, to enjoy himself, without having any business to pursue, or any cares to distract his mind. But this very rest, to which he aspires, is, except in extreme old age, one of

the greatest evils, which can be inflicted on him. Listen, my brethren, to them, who have quitted the world and its bustle, and who, as they say, have nothing to do but to rest ; and you will be convinced by the discordant sounds, which they utter, that content is a stranger to their breasts. Observe them : their faces are gloomy ; their actions are spiritless ; they complain of their disordered nerves, of their blunted senses, of the languor and insipidity of their lives : they have too much time for anxious thoughts ; and it is their general employment to brood over their imaginary woes. On the other hand, look at the industrious : what cheerfulness is there in their countenances ; what spirit, in their actions ; with what celerity do they move ; and how keen is their relish for every enjoyment ! They have not leisure to complain ; nor time to discover, that they have any causes of uneasiness. You may say, that they are not perfectly happy ; but you cannot say, that they are miserable. The truth is, that they experience a satisfaction, which they cannot stop to analyze, and which is not so striking, as always to excite attention ; but which is not, on that account, the less real and constant.

Such being the good effects of industry, you ought, my brethren, to cultivate an early acquaintance with it, and to regard it as your best friend. It is necessary that the habit should be formed in youth ; for if you are idle in the first part of life,



you cannot afterward easily become active. If you give way to indolence for a few years, you will find it almost impossible to make an exertion. Some of you, without doubt, have experienced this listlessness ; and you have seen, after a long discontinuance of any practice, how hard it was to do what you once thought the easiest thing imaginable. Follow industry then as the source of a contented mind. On the other advantages attending it I do not expatiate. I only say in a word, that industry preserves health ; that industry gains riches ; that industry acquires knowledge ; and that industry renders a man eminent in his station.

3. A third rule, which I give for the acquisition of a contented mind, is, that you should make a judicious choice of your profession in life. Many men are uneasy and dissatisfied, because they are out of place : they have no talents nor relish for the business, which they follow. God has bestowed his gifts with so much impartiality and bounty on his creatures, that whilst no man has received them all, to almost every man have been imparted sufficient to qualify him for a particular employment. There is a station, in which if he cannot become distinguished, he can at least be made useful ; whilst in other situations he is embarrassed and unskilful. Feeling that he is destitute of the talents requisite for the business, which he follows, and unable to

execute the duties of it to his own satisfaction, his mind is discontented, and his exertions are feeble and interrupted. It may be asked, what remedy there is for this evil, when he has been long engaged in an employment? I answer, that in general there is none; for it is commonly impracticable to change a profession. The unfortunate man must endeavour to accommodate his mind to his situation; and be satisfied with performing, as well as he can, what he cannot perform in the best manner. I do not pretend to make them contented, who are already uneasy: the evil, when it exists, cannot be entirely cured; but in the beginning it might have been prevented. You ought therefore, as far as depends on yourselves, to make use of your utmost care and discretion in the choice of your employment. You should study your own disposition and talents; and not rashly venture on a profession, in which you cannot be either useful or happy. I am sensible, that in this affair much depends on your parents; and that without consulting your inclinations, they sometimes choose for you professions, which correspond with their own interested or ambitious notions. They must answer for it, when you become useless and wretched by their means: but allowing, that they are highly to be blamed, is it not true, that your own pride and rashness are frequently the causes of your entering on employments, where you reap an abundant harvest of chagrin and discontent?

4. Another source of uneasiness of mind is an irritable temper. Accordingly, a fourth rule, which I give is, cultivate a mild and placable disposition. Good temper is in some degree the gift of nature : there are men, who are formed of soft and kind materials ; but others, whose minds seem to be composed of sour and bitter stuff, should not despair : they should endeavour to acquire by religion what was not originally given. They may plead, that it is difficult to subdue the natural fierceness of their tempers : be it so ; but until they obtain this command of themselves, they cannot enjoy content.

5. A fifth rule, which I give, is, that you ought not, my brethren, to yield to your passions : I do not mean merely your angry passions, but your passions of every kind. On this head it would not be proper to enlarge : I would observe however, that the principal reason why many young men are not more contented, and why they wear such a haggard look of vexation on their faces, is, that they have fancied there is pleasure where there is none ; and instead of being governed by prudence and moderation, they have chosen to give the reins to their unruly passions. In youth we should expect to find the most abundant share of happiness : for every object has then the charm of novelty ; and the heart is warm and disposed to friendship. But many young men, smothering that

spirit of curiosity, which should animate their hearts, and which would find ample gratification in the innumerable wonders, that nature and art present them on every side, give themselves up to idleness and dissipation, to a repetition of the same tasteless joys and unsatisfactory pleasures, in which there is nothing new to elevate or delight them. At the same time, neglecting to cultivate a pure and virtuous friendship with persons, who possess either brilliancy of imagination, extensive science, or profundity of thought, and by whom their knowledge would be enlarged, and their understandings enlightened and improved,—they engage in scandalous connexions, by which their taste is depraved and their morals corrupted. To sympathy and affection they are strangers; for the feast of reason and fancy they have no relish; but the only tie, which unites them with their companions, is a participation in the same intemperate mirth, and the same intoxicating draughts of pleasure. They are discontented; I may use a stronger term: they are wretched. Who can wonder? It is not in such scenes, and by such objects, that content is to be obtained.

6. Another rule, which I give, is, to seek content in the cultivation of friendship. I need not use arguments to prove, that content is unknown to the man, who believes that no one loves him. I have no doubt, my hearers, that most of you make

a great part of your felicity consist in the society and affection of them, whom you regard. Friendship is the favourite theme of all, who possess feeling hearts. The value of the blessing is acknowledged ; but it is not always pursued. I would therefore say, that he who hopes for friendship, must not satisfy himself with celebrating its worth : he must secure it by his own exertions. The rule here is simple and obvious : If you would obtain friends, you must be friendly. You must treat them, whose regard you wish to conciliate, with affection and confidence. You must enter into their joys ; you must participate in their sorrows. You must endure their infirmities ; you must assist them in distress. You must manifest ; and you must feel, pleasure in their company. Such friendship as this is generally confined to a few. He, who hopes for the fulness of content, must commonly move in a small circle. The society of the individuals of a small number of families will be sufficient to satisfy his heart. When he extends himself beyond this limit, the fervour of affection will be proportionably diminished. For friendship will be substituted ceremony and parade. Visits, which are brilliant, and perfectly civil, but at the same time cold, and somewhat tedious, will take place of those conversations, which are lively and heart-felt. To the world, and decorum, as it is called, it is true, sacrifices must be made ; but let

us not sacrifice all our happiness. Let us have some friends, in whose bosoms we can be at home ; to whom we can speak without art or distrust, without the fiction of flattery, or the flourish of unmeaning compliment.\* These pleasures are principally to be found in the society of parents, brothers, and sisters, and sometimes of what may be justly styled a still dearer name. It would always be found in the latter connexion, if the young, in the choice of a companion for life, did not too frequently conduct themselves injudiciously. Truth however compels me to say, that not a few of the discontents of human beings arise from what ought to be the source of perpetual satisfaction. I have shown the importance of making choice of a suitable profession ; but this choice is of still greater moment. If it is not made with discretion, the consequence will be, that in a house, which ought to be the abode of peace and harmony, will be heard the voice of loud complaint and mutual reproach. To you therefore, my young friends, who are still free to choose and to reject, I would recommend to exercise caution, and to consult your reason. If it is not in your power, as it may not always be, to discover a person agreeable to your taste, and who would render you happy, be contented to pass through life in a single state. The matrimonial connexion was undoubtedly intended by Heaven as a blessing to mankind : it is not however absolutely essential to hap-

piness ; and incomparably better is the situation of that person, who is alone, than of the person, who is yoked with a fool, a drunkard, or a tyrant.

7. I would give only one ~~more~~ rule, which is, that we should cultivate religion, which, when all other means fail, diffuses peace and satisfaction into the mind. I have observed before, that virtue is necessary to produce content. Religion includes virtue ; but at present I use the term in a sacred sense. By it I mean that love of God, which arises from a sense of his goodness to us, and a contemplation of his perfections and works. When we study the nature of God, and the universe which he has created, we perceive so many marks of benevolence, that we conclude, that he is a wise and gracious Being, who has formed a perfect plan, the object of which is the happiness of his creatures. As we become convinced, that every thing which he does is right, and will terminate in perfection, we are disposed to acquiesce, whatever uneasiness we may personally suffer; believing that evil is accidental, whilst good is essential and eternal. Such a belief taught the Apostle Paul to be content, in whatever condition he was placed. He passed through many labours and sufferings ; but his soul was animated by religion, which enabled him to endure them with patience, and even with cheerfulness. Under all his trials and afflictions he

beheld the hand of God ; and he knew, that what God did could not be wrong. I exhort you, my brethren, to imitate his spirit ; and like him, to look forward to a future world. In the present scene you cannot expect perfect happiness ; for it is a first state, and is intended to discipline you in virtue. Whatever causes of uneasiness remain therefore, after you have endeavoured by every proper means to obtain content, you should submit to with resignation ; as you have reason to believe, that they will be of short duration ; and that beyond the grave, what is now wanting to complete happiness will be supplied, what is rough will be made smooth, and what is obscure will be illuminated.

2d S. after Easter.



## SERMON XVIII.

DUTIES OF CITIZENS.


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PSALMS cxxii. 6.

PRAY FOR THE PEACE OF JERUSALEM: THEY SHALL PROSPER THAT LOVE THEE.

ON this day of publick thanksgiving and prayer, we are reminded of the relations, in which the citizens of a state stand to each other, and of the duties, to which they are mutually obliged. I beg permission to lay before you a few thoughts on this subject, under the form of observations and inquiries; and I doubt not, that whilst you reject those parts of them, which appear to you erroneous, you will admit the parts, which are manifestly true.

1. The first observation is, that it is the duty of every person in society to love his country. The love of our country implies the obligation to exert all our talents, to establish the peace of the nation, to which we belong. Man owes something to himself, something to his family, something to his fellow citizens, and something to mankind at large. The




two former obligations are approved by nature, which justifies every man in loving himself and family ; and the latter is enjoined by the Christian religion, which inculcates universal benevolence : but where these obligations interfere, we must yield our private and domestick interest to the interest of our country, and the interest of a foreign nation to that of our own. The obligation of sacrificing our private good to the good of the publick may not be universally conceded ; but that it is our duty to prefer our own nation to any other, will generally be allowed. The reason why this should be required of us is obvious : The prosperity of the world at large will be most effectually secured by every one of us promoting, as far as we can do it, the welfare of the nation, of which we are parts. The sphere of each man's agency is necessarily small ; and he can seldom extend the effects of his good deeds to any country, except his own. It is our duty then to love our country, to pray for its peace and prosperity, to act with fidelity the part assigned to us for the interest of the community, and to defend its rights and independence against ~~nostrum~~ attacks. It is not my intention to justify the narrow national prejudices, which are not less common here, than in other parts of the world. There may be climes more favoured than our own, and people more enlightened, more courteous, and more honest than ourselves : but whilst we are willing to allow

this, and every candid man ought to allow it, if it is true,—we should still love our country more than any other, as we love our own children in the highest degree, though they may be less accomplished than the children of our neighbours. As however it is the duty of a parent to correct the faults, and to improve the virtues of his children, so ought we to conduct ourselves toward our country : whatever is mean, fraudulent, or vitious, in the principles and habits of our fellow citizens, we should reform as far as we can, by our exhortations, and in particular by our example.

2. A second observation is, that it is the duty of every citizen to support the constitution, to be a good subject of the government, to give all due respect to the rulers and magistrates, and to obey the laws, which are enacted by legislative authority. This obligation is universal in its extent, as we are bound to obey the laws, which we dislike, as well as the laws, which we approve.

Respecting these two duties there is no dispute ; they are maintained by all parties among us, however widely they may differ on other points ; and when a man violates either of them, he is condemned by the general opinion of his fellow citizens.

3. The truth of a third observation, which I shall make, is perhaps not so obvious at first sight ; but



it appears to me equally certain : it is this, that it is the duty of every person, under such a government as ours, to give his vote on all occasions, in which he is authorized or qualified for the act. The theory of our government is, that all power is derived from the people : they appoint, either mediately or immediately, every officer from the highest to the lowest. As it is the duty of them, who are appointed, to discharge with diligence and fidelity their several obligations ; so it is not less the duty of every qualified voter to perform the part assigned to him, which is to attend the elections. For should a large number of the citizens neglect it,—and one man has as much right to neglect it as another,—the persons chosen, though the legal, may not be the true, representatives of the people, and ordinances may be established, which are opposed to the publick sentiment.

I am sensible that they, who are accustomed to this neglect, justify it by several reasons.—One, which is urged by industrious citizens, is, that the duties of their profession require all their time, and they conceive that they benefit their country more, by attending with diligence to their several callings, than by intermeddling with publick affairs. In answer to this objection it may be said, that all, which is demanded of any voter, is to give to elections a few hours of a small number of days in a year. It may also be said, that the industrious are generally

the most judicious, sober, and orderly members of the community. They ought therefore to attend elections, which otherwise might be conducted by the idle.

Another objection is, that although it is the theory of our government, that all power is derived from the whole body of the people, yet that the fact is different : because nominations are, and from the nature of things must of necessity be, previously made by men, who either with, or without, right and reason take this part on them ; consequently all that any citizen can do is to give either his affirmative or negative to such nomination, without being able in many instances to vote for a person, whom he judges the best qualified for the proposed office ; and that this power is of so little value, that it is not worth exercising.—This objection, it must be acknowledged, is of weight ; but in answer to it I would say, that if the fact, on which it is founded, is an evil, it is an evil, which admits of no remedy. If every person in the community, without regard to a previous nomination, should vote only for the man, who in his opinion would fill an office with the most wisdom and dignity, there are few cases in which an election could take place : for our judgments on human characters are as various, as our taste, our prejudices, our sympathies, and our aversions. Because we cannot exert all the power, which we desire, it does not follow that we ought not to use the power,

which we possess. Besides it may be observed, that this evil is not worse than others which exist in society, but of which no reasonable person ever thinks of complaining. In many important elections, which we are called upon to make, and in which our usefulness and happiness are involved, we are seldom allowed to do any thing more, than to give an affirmative or negative. If these restrictions are submitted to with patience, an evil, which resembles them, should be borne with equal resignation.

4. Another objection against attending elections, which is alleged by several peaceable and worthy men, is, that the republick is divided into parties, both of whom are influenced by so many prejudices, that they do not think themselves under obligations to vote with either of them. An important question therefore arises here : what is the duty of a good citizen in this respect ; and when parties exist in a nation, is it wrong to choose a side ? It is well known to all, who are acquainted with history, that freedom and a party spirit are inseparably connected : that is, in every nation, where the people are allowed to speak and act as they please, one part of them has always chosen to speak and act differently from the other part. For this evil, if it is an evil, there is no other cure than despotism. Our own country, which from its first settlement to

the present moment has, with the exception of a few intervals, enjoyed a large share of liberty, has never been exempt from these divisions. At this time in particular, the two divisions of the nation are distinctly marked ; and there are few among us, who, when they vote, do not vote with a party.

There are many good citizens, who, possessing little knowledge of human nature, say that this is wrong. They assert, that men ought to be all of one mind ; that they ought to pursue the welfare of their country, and as there is not but one way of rendering it prosperous, that there should be no disagreement respecting the means : that as there is only one true religion, so there is only one true system of politicks ; and that they, who oppose it, are either wilfully blind, or are influenced by corrupt motives. A party spirit, according to them, is an evil, which would not exist, if men would think and choose what is right, if they would think and choose the same thing. This mode of reasoning has great weight in the minds of many well meaning persons of opposite political sentiments ; and they yield to its consequences. One class of politicians in the state is, they believe, friendly, and another hostile, to the interest of their country. They join themselves to the former, the wise and upright leaders, and with zeal and courage support their principles and measures ; but the divisions, which they lament, still exist ; for the light of truth, which they main-

tain shines on all, is not seen by a great number of citizens, who are as honest and clearsighted as themselves.


There are other citizens more enlightened, who do not entertain so exalted an opinion of the infallibility of their own judgments. They suppose that many political propositions are probable, but not demonstrable. Difficulties may be raised, and plausible objections may be urged, which embarrass a subject, and prevent the mind from being fully satisfied. They perceive however, that there is a balance of arguments in their favour, and it induces them to give their assent ; and they choose and act with as much decision, as if they were guided by the most absolute certainty. For they are sensible that there is nothing peculiar in the case, as in innumerable other instances they have no light to direct their steps, except probability. These persons are more moderate than the first mentioned ; but they are not less disposed than they to take a side. They join themselves to the party of leading politicians, whom on the whole they believe to be right, and who, in their opinion, the most frequently pursue the true interest of the country ; without pretending that their friends always conduct themselves with perfect discretion, or that the opposite party is always in the wrong, and that its measures are always pernicious.



There are other citizens, whose minds are so weak and volatile, that they are incapable of remaining long fixed in any sentiment. They wander from opinion to opinion, being influenced by the last impression received, from the conversation which they have heard, or the book which they have read. Candour is the virtue, to which they lay claim ; but their candour has no other foundation than inconstancy of heart and imbecility of understanding.

There are other citizens, who also properly belong to neither party ; for, governed by no other motive than self-interest, they take their stand on the confines of both, where with a single step they can join themselves to the side, that proves to be the strongest.

If therefore the question is again asked, whether a citizen ought to join himself to a party, and remain faithful to it? the just answer seems to be, that the honest and the wise will generally do so, and that the neutrals are chiefly to be found among the weak and the selfish. I mean not to assert, that a man may not conscientiously alter his system of politicks, when he is convinced by, what appear to him, weighty arguments : I believe he may as honestly do it, as he may change his religion, when truths, which were formerly unknown, are opened to his mind. Nor do I say, that *every* wise and honest man will necessarily take a side ; for there



are persons of this character, who from various causes have never attended to the subject : but this observation I would make, that every man, who thinks on the matter, will incline to the one party or the other ; because it is nearly impossible that two opposite propositions should be presented in such a light to the human understanding, that it should discern no preference between them. Still less do I affirm, that there are not a few persons, who have attained such heights of philosophy and devotion, that they soar above all sublunary objects, and who, having on the wings of contemplation approached near the throne of God, look down on the contests of politicians as on the disputes of children. But as the weak and volatile, whom I have described before, are less, so these men are more, than human : the minds, that are necessarily occupied with the ordinary concerns of life, cannot imitate them, and follow them in their sublime contemplations.

5. As the inhabitants of every free country are divided into parties, an important inquiry arises : by what means should a citizen support the cause, which he has adopted ; and in what manner ought he to treat his opponents ? The general answer to this inquiry is, that every citizen is bound to conduct himself with sincerity and veracity, with good-humour and candour, in a word, like a man of honour and benevolence. No rancour should be felt

or expressed. Whilst we boast that in religion unbounded toleration exists, that every man is allowed to worship God according to his conscience, we should be equally tolerant in politicks. We should not molest or censure our fellow citizens, when they are exercising the privileges, which of right belong to them ; but we should permit them to vote as they please, and to follow what leaders they please.

They, who differ from each other in politicks, ought to remember that they are men, and have the same common nature ; that they are generally Christians, and have the same religion ; and that they are citizens of the same republick, and have the same common country : consequently that there are more ties to unite them, than causes to divide their affections. These motives should inspire their minds with forbearance toward each other, with respect, and kindness. After employing all proper means to attain their end, the minority ought to submit with a good grace to the decision of the majority, not impeding the wheels of government by any factious opposition. On the other hand, the majority ought to use with moderation the ascendancy, which they have gained, without displaying the insolence and spirit of persecution, which are too apt to characterize a triumphant party. This conduct is enjoined by good policy, not less than by reason and justice ; because events, which in a free country

depend on the breath of the people, are so uncertain, that the party reigning to-day, may to-morrow be deprived of all power. In the course of forty years we have seen more than one change take place. Judging therefore from experience, we may with a high degree of probability expect, that the publick sentiment will in future be equally variable.

6. Another inquiry of importance is, what measures may be lawfully used to displace rulers, whom we disapprove? The most ready answer, which can be given to this question, is, that when the period of election returns, we have nothing to do, but silently to vote against them. The general practice however extends farther; and if it did not, no person, however ignorant or corrupt, could often be removed from office; because a mere silent vote produces little effect. Many therefore, who have learned the use of the pen, undertake to write on the subject; and many, who have not acquired this art, indulge themselves with freedom in uttering their objections. This is the custom of both parties. I presume not to decide which party exceeds in severity; nor whether either of them has cause to boast of peculiar candour. The fact is, that great abuses have taken place, and that, without any benefit to the community, wounds have been wantonly and cruelly inflicted on individuals. But because the privilege has been abused, it is not less

character. In the mean time, whilst he fervently and devoutly prays for the peace of his country, he will be grateful for the blessings, which Heaven bestows on him. He will thank God, that he is placed in a region, which produces in abundance all the necessaries and comforts of life. He will thank his everlasting Friend for his personal and domestick pleasures. He will rejoice in divine goodness, that he has the happiness of knowing, and admiring, and loving many, whose understandings are illuminated by wisdom, and whose hearts are adorned with virtue and piety. He will thank the Governour of the universe for bestowing on his country freedom and independence. He will, in particular, acknowledge the manifold grace of his heavenly Father for revealing to him the light of the gospel, and for inspiring his mind with the hope, that an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away, will succeed this state of inconstancy and imperfection.

Thanksgiving Day. 1st Thursday in Dec.

A

## CHARGE.

DELIVERED IN BROOKLYN, CONNECTICUT, AT THE INSTALLATION OF REV. SAMUEL JOSEPH MAY, NOV. 5TH, 1823.

**MY DEAR BROTHER,**

YOUR duty as a minister of the gospel is best learned from the sacred scriptures, and from your own observation and experience; but as it is customary on these occasions to deliver a charge, and as it has pleased the ecclesiastical council, convened for your installation, to assign that part to me, I enter upon it in obedience to their commands.

Your duty is,—to lead the publick devotions of the church; to read a portion of the holy bible, whenever your people shall be assembled in this house; to administer the ordinances; to catechise the children; to visit the sick; to comfort the afflicted; and to preach the doctrines and precepts of the christian religion. But as an exhortation on all these heads would require more time, than this auditory can afford, I will confine myself to the last, your duty as a preacher of the gospel. I make

this selection, because preaching is generally considered in the churches of New-England as the pre-eminent business of a christian minister. This was the common opinion of our ancestors and of their contemporaries in England ; and it is not much impaired in the present age. In many other churches preaching is regarded as a secondary object ; whilst it is supposed that the essential parts, which the clergy have to perform, are prayer and the administration of the sacraments. Whatever your private opinion on this subject may be, it is proper that you should adopt the customs, that prevail in the age and country in which you live, provided they are innocent, and can most easily be made the instruments of doing good.

Preaching is of two kinds, speculative and practical.

I. The former, though the least useful, is not without its advantages. A sermon on such a subject produces an intellectual exertion in the hearers, and invigorates, exalts, and, if the arguments alleged are not sophistical, purifies their minds. In the present state of religious sentiment among us, it seems to be absolutely necessary that you should sometimes give your attention to subjects of speculation. For a great variety of doctrines, which are more or less opposed to each other, is proclaimed in our land. Few of them in any church are taken on trust ; but

almost all of them have powerful advocates, who are able to produce either sound or plausible arguments in their favour. As you are encompassed by men of strong and enlightened minds, you also should be furnished with reasons, with which you can defend your creed. The people are not only willing, but eager to hear sermons on these subjects; and it is proper they should be gratified, as far as it can be done without weakening their charity, and diverting their attention from the great business of life, the fear of God and obedience to his commands. I counsel you therefore to make yourself master of all the learning, which may be necessary to qualify you for the writing of such discourses. Happily this is not so laborious a task at present, as it would have been in former ages; because almost every region of theological science has been carefully explored by different persons, who has each one, according to his taste, examined a portion of the tract. For the sake of saving time, which you may devote to a still more important purpose, I recommend to you to avail yourself of their labours. In this age of the church it is unnecessary that you should read the Fathers, except for improvement in morals and devotion; because others have read them for you, and have extracted from them almost all the facts, which they contain. In like manner you may satisfy yourself with the results of biblical criticism, without entering into all the details. It



will be sufficient to make yourself acquainted with the various readings of the bible, which produce any alteration in the meaning of texts, whilst you pass over the many other various readings, which are acknowledged by all to be of no importance. You will not forget that the time of this transitory life is too precious, to be much employed in the minutiae of knowledge, of whatever kind it may be ; and that the mental sight, when it pores too long over microscopical objects, is contracted within limits, which become more and more narrow, till at last it almost loses the power of extending itself to the magnificent prospects of nature and religion.

Having collected from the works of the great masters in theology as much learning, as your leisure and opportunities permit, you will impart the knowledge, which you have acquired, to your people, as far as may be useful to them. As they will not understand you, unless your intellectual vision is distinct, endeavour to obtain a clear view of every subject, which you offer to their attention. Let there be light in your mind, and there will be light in your discourses. Gain, whatever it may cost you, the art of writing with perspicuity. Obscurity of style arises not so much from hard words, as from hard sentences, and from using words in a new sense. There are publick speakers, who, for the sake of making themselves intelligible to the vulgar,

affect to preach in homely language. Now this is as needless, as it is offensive ; because in this country such a class as the vulgar scarcely exists. There are few of our men and women, who in their childhood were not taught at schools ; and beside reading the holy Scriptures, in which there is such a treasure of words fitly spoken, of words that shine like apples of gold in pictures of silver ; beside this divine volume, they are in the practice of reading the best written English books, in which a great variety of terms, scientifick as well as elegant, are introduced. But even they, with all their advantages of education, cannot comprehend a sentence, in which there is no meaning, or in which the words are thrown together without order, or in which the principal term has a meaning, but one which it never received before. Let there be no superfluity in your language. One pungent word will penetrate more deeply into the understanding, than a pointless word, which is barbed with two or three of a similar signification. Be a severe critick on your own compositions ; and expunge not only every word, but every sentence, and every paragraph, which is not to the purpose. This may render your sermons shorter ; but what you lose in mass, you will gain in weight : and it will be most acceptable to your auditors ; because the attention to a speculative discourse becomes painful, when it is too long continued.

As the doctrines, which you believe, ought to be conformable to reason, you should accustom yourself to a dispassionate method of treating them. Enthusiasm is as much out of place here, as it would be in the demonstration of a mathematical theorem. With whatever loudness of voice or vehemence of gesture a proposition may be announced, it cannot be proved, if one part of it contradicts another, or if it is indisputably opposed to any established truth. You will more readily convince the understanding of your hearers, and preclude the objections, which might arise in their minds, if you are moderate as well as calm ; if you qualify one doctrine by another. There are propositions, which are true to a certain extent ; but not true, if they are carried to an extreme.

In the present state of biblical science you have not much cause to expect, that you can make any new discoveries in the explanation of difficult texts. Light may occasionally break out, and the just meaning of a passage, which has hitherto been involved in obscurity, may be made evident to all reasonable minds ; but aspire not to the honour of being the first, who shall dispel this darkness. Seek for truth, and not for novelty. It is no objection against the interpretation of a text, that Grotius, or Locke, or Clarke maintained it, before you were born.

In fine, let the few speculative sermons, which you deliver, be concluded with a practical exhortation. Point out the connexion, which exists between the belief of true doctrines and godliness and holiness ; and whilst you allow that many men, who espouse erroneous sentiments, do honour to the gospel by the sanctity of their lives, at the same time show that it is not from their errors, but from the truths, which they mingle with them, this good effect has been derived. They believe in God, and in the essential doctrines of the gospel. They have built a house of precious materials on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone ; but they have, to their own discomfort, encumbered it with stubble, which in some measure excludes the light of heaven. When however this useless matter is removed, the building, which has been fitly framed together, will remain ; and it will appear to be, what it is in effect, an holy temple in the Lord.

II. The other kind of preaching is that, which relates to practice. This is the most difficult, but the most important part of your duty ; for by the confession of all Christians the principal design of preaching is to render men pious and holy.

As one good way of learning any art is to study the best models of that art, you will carefully peruse

the practical discourses of the most eminent preachers, in particular those that are written in the English language ; in which there is more of truth and nature, of just views of human life, and of genuine pathos, and less of exaggeration and of turgid and heartless eloquence, than exist in the southern languages of Europe.

Beside sermons, read the works of piety and christian morality, which establish duty on the most solid basis, and exalt it to the highest point ; where the glory of God illuminates the whole of the divine edifice, and disinterested love crowns the summit ; and where the various motives and associations, which gradually raise the mind from the earth to the throne of the Eternal, are displayed in the light of day.

Study also your own heart. You will undoubtedly find there many germs of virtue, which demonstrate that it was planted by the hand of infinite wisdom and goodness ; but you will also find there temptations to sin, and the beginnings of folly, and the remains of imperfection, which you possess in common with all other moral agents, who are in a state of probation. Describe yourself justly, and you will describe your fellow Christians.

Examine also the actions of other men ; but look at the human beings, by whom you are surrounded, and not often at those, who inhabit distant regions.

The character of the people of New-England, with whom you are to pass your life, is in many respects entitled to praise. There is among them much of civility, of decency of behaviour, of neighbourly offices, of publick and private beneficence, of order and harmony in families, of attention to the education of children, of regard to religion, and of zeal in the cause of truth. Many of our men do honour to the towns and societies, of which they are members ; and many of our women, by their discretion, fidelity, tenderness, and piety, are the glory of their husbands or parents. Whilst you acknowledge all this, forbear not to condemn the sins of the land. Inveigh not against the abominations of India, and the corruptions of the great cities of Europe, from which through the goodness of God we are happily exempt ; but direct your attention to the vices, which obtrude themselves on your sight. I might proceed to specify these vices ; but as they are obvious, it is unnecessary : it will be sufficient, if I say that they are not few in number, and that they will furnish you with subjects for many discourses.

Look also at the men of your own times, and not so much at those of a former age. Though the inhabitants of New-England retain somewhat of the manners of their forefathers ; yet it is universally confessed, that changes have gradually taken place

in their character. Our ancestors were a race of men, who were firm in their resolutions, and courageous in executing them ; who were sober in their lives, and pious in their conversation ; who had a due regard for the interests of learning, and an ardent zeal in the cause of what they believed to be evangelical truth. But they brought with them from the parent country many crude notions on law and religion ; their minds were filled with superstitious terrors ; they were too much disposed to lay stress on trifles ; and their conceptions of the sublime extent of the morality of the gospel, particularly of mutual toleration, were imperfect. For their faults an apology may be made ; and the amount of it is this, that they were two centuries younger than the present generation. We call them the ancients, and this term misleads us. It is true, that if they were now alive, they would be our elders ; but as they died before the light, which illuminates us, had diffused its beams on the church, they could not enjoy the benefit of this superiour lustre. You should, my brother, contemplate their characters with the same satisfaction, with which a man of wisdom and virtue looks back on his childhood, when it has been passed in innocence and diligence. He would not now be so far advanced in knowledge and goodness, if the early part of his life had been consumed in idleness and naughtiness. He made a proper be-

ginning, which has rendered his subsequent progress more easy. In like manner are you and the other descendants of those, who first built towns, and schools, and churches in New-England, indebted to them for many of the commencements of your improvements in science and religion. But as no wise and good man ever thinks of making the glimmering notions of infancy the standard of his faith, or its imperfect conceptions of duty the rule of his moral practice ; so ought you to conduct yourself with respect to those, who lived in the infancy of New-England. You should say with the Apostle Paul, 'When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things. Whilst you deem it improper to arrest the ascent of the mind at the point, to which our ancestors attained, you will exhort your hearers to imitate them in every thing, which is laudable. In the mean time you will cast your eyes carefully around, that you may discover what moral evils have sprung up in the present age. To them you will pay your principal attention ; and you will exert yourself to eradicate them, wherever they appear.

Look also at the faults of the men of your own religious party, but not at the moral imperfections of the professors of different opinions. Whilst you may consistently with that love, in which the truth



should always be spoken, combat what appears to you to be an error, you ought to remember, that a discourse, not of argument but reproach, which is hurled against a church of an opposite creed, and which, either with scorn or hatred, censures its supposed fanaticism, superstition, or bigotry, cannot benefit the church to which it is addressed ; because it is not a candid Christian sermon, but a satirical invective against the absent ; and its tendency is to produce in the minds of its hearers the very prejudice and bitterness, which it condemns. Observe only the conduct of your friends and adherents : If in any thing they have done amiss ; if they have offended against the duty, which they owe to God, to Jesus their Saviour, or to their fellow men, seriously and earnestly exhort them to offend no more.

It is not necessary that every practical sermon, which you preach, should be a reproof of sin : you may sometimes with salutary effect introduce subjects of commendation. Propose the example of good men, that you may excite the emulation of your hearers. There is in the sacred Scriptures one perfect character, of whom you cannot say too much, and whom you cannot extol too highly. Jesus of Nazareth was a man approved of God ; he constantly went about doing good ; and he always did those things, which pleased his heavenly

**Father.** I exhort you to make him the frequent theme of your praise ; and let all your eloquence be exerted, to fill the bosoms of your people with the love and gratitude, which they owe him for the transcendent blessings derived from his divine religion.

Hold up also to the eye of your people the example of the saints, whose lives are recorded in the Old and New Testaments, and who, though they were not free from human infirmity, were nevertheless distinguished for their faith, patience, and submission to the divine will ; for their zeal, charity, and devotion.

It may also be useful to describe the good men of later times ; and in a series of biographical discourses to give a body to those moral truths, which attract less attention, when they are proposed in too abstract a manner. There is in almost every human mind a love of narrative : it delights us in infancy ; it charms us in youth ; and it continues to interest us even in mature age. The lives of such active, benevolent, and pious men, as Watts, Lindsey, and Howard, if they are delineated with truth, will afford not less instruction than pleasure.

In the progress of your ministry, you will have opportunities of approaching still nearer to the bosoms of your hearers. When God in his providence removes from your church a valuable member, you

will feel it to be your duty to impart comfort to the mourning friends ; and one of the sources of this comfort is a description of the virtues of the deceased. When a lovely woman in the bloom of life is compelled by a consumption to yield her breath, you cannot forbear to praise her calmness and patience, and the entire resignation with which she submits to the will of God, and gives up the world and all its enjoyments. Again, when the head of a family, who is eminent for prudence, watchfulness, and kindness, who is a useful member of society, an honest man, and a rational, humble, and devout Christian,—is taken from his wife and children, who are deprived by his death of the cheerfulness, which was continually increasing under his affectionate eye,—you cannot fail to convince his surviving friends, by a faithful portrait of his excellent character, that he is worthy of their love and homage. Subjects such as these, if they are treated with discretion, and not too frequently, produce beneficial effects. They render the hearts of your people tender ; and your sympathy binds them to you with the cords of love.

These are only specimens of the practical subjects, which may engage your attention. In truth these subjects, are more numerous, than I am able to express. The difficulty is to find thoughts to fill

up the outline ; the lucid order, in which they should be arranged ; and the proper words, which should give them colour and expression. To surmount this difficulty, I advise you to devote all the time, which you pass alone, and which is not employed in reading and devotion, to intense meditation. Whenever you walk, or ride, or work, let your mind be engaged in the composition of sermons. Waste none of your solitary moments in idle musing, or in framing schemes of impossible happiness. Think, as much as is possible, in words. Gather in your imagination an auditory about you, and conceive yourself as addressing them in a serious and animated exhortation. By this means, when you enter your study, and sit down to write, you will have little else to do, than to transfer to paper the words, which have been previously inscribed on your mind.

I conclude my address with this solemn charge : Whenever you meditate the subject of a discourse, consider yourself in the presence of a holy Being, to whom you are accountable for all your words. A belief, that his eye beholds you, will guard your mind against the intrusion of vain thoughts ; and it will lead you to reject the subjects, from which a profitable moral cannot be extracted, and which do not tend to promote the glory of God and the interests of religion. In a word, be a devout Chris-

tian, and you will then be a zealous and edifying preacher. Whilst your meditations are accompanied with humble prayer to the Father of spirits, you will have reason to hope, that he will be graciously pleased to assist you in your sincere endeavours to write his law upon the tablet of your heart, and in your diligent search to find out acceptable words, by which you can impress it deeply on the hearts of your fellow men.

FINIS.

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